

## INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND POVERTY ERADICATION IN NIGERIA

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### Abstract

*Nigeria, a country endowed with tremendous natural resources and rich ethno-cultural diversity, continues to face significant challenges in sustainable community development and poverty eradication. Despite several government policies and international aid programmes to eradicate poverty and create enabling environment for sustainable community development, poverty remains prevalent, particularly in the rural areas. This paper discusses some of the innovative approaches that have been initiated and implemented in Nigeria to promote sustainable community development and reduce poverty to improve the lives and livelihood of the citizenry. These approaches include Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure, National Directorate of Employment, the Directorate for Mass Mobilization for social Justice and Economic Recovery, Better Life programme, Family Support Programme, Technology Integration, Community Based initiations, Microfinance, Education and Policy reforms. The paper also examines the challenges these approaches face and offers suggestions for their improvement and scalability. Through the analysis of case studies and the incorporation of global best practices, this paper offers a thorough overview of strategies that can enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of development outcomes in Nigeria.*

**Keyword:** Innovative approaches, sustainable community development, poverty eradication, Nigeria.

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### Introduction

Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation with a population estimate of over 200 million people (World Bank, 2020) and one of the largest economies (World Bank, 2020) faces a paradox of water, water everywhere and no single one to drink on wealth and poverty. Despite great natural wealth, Nigeria is poor and social development is limited (NPC, 2004). It is estimated that about two-thirds of the Nigerian people are poor, despite living in a country with vast potential wealth.

According to recent estimates by the World Bank, about 40% of Nigerians, which translates to over 83 million people, live below the poverty line. This means they earn less than \$1.90 per day, the international threshold for extreme poverty. This high poverty rate influenced by several factors, including unemployment, inflation, inadequate infrastructure, lack of access to better services, such as education and healthcare, weak and inappropriate public sector, poor economic Management and hostile environment for private sector growth (NPC, 2004).

Poverty in Nigeria is not uniformly, distributed; it varies significantly across geo-political regions, with the highest proportion of poor people in the north-west and the lowest in the

south-east (NPC, 2004). This may probably due to better access to education, healthcare attitude and shrewd approach to social economic opportunities and entrepreneurial skills.

To address this issue of poverty, past Nigeria government has initiated and implemented several poverty eradication programmes aimed at lifting Nigeria people out of Poverty level. Omoruyi (2001) noted that the Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DIFRRI) was established on 13 May 1987 to bridge the wide gap between the rural areas and the urban centres in terms of development. The National Directorate for Employment is another organ set up by the government to ameliorate poverty. It came into existence on the 22<sup>nd</sup> November, 1986 and was formally launched on the 30th of January, 1987 with one of its objectives being creation of job opportunities for the teeming population of jobless Nigerians. The National Social Investment Programme (NSIP), launched in 2016, aimed at addressing poverty and promoting economic development. The programme includes the N-Power initiative, which provides skills acquisition and job opportunities for unemployed graduates, and the Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP), which offers microloan to Small and Medium enterprises (NBS, 2021).

However, the impact of these programmes has been limited due to issues such as corruption, bureaucratic inefficiencies, inadequate funding and poor economic management. The implementation of these programmes often faces challenges at the grassroots level, where majority of the poor live. Additionally, the lack of continuity in policy implementation, particularly when there is a change in government hampers the effectiveness of these initiatives. Also, the Private initiatives refers to the efforts or activities of Philanthropists (Omoruyi, 2001), toward poverty alleviation and sustainable community development are well noted. Over the years, private initiative in development had been encouraged to facilitate the development process of the rural areas since government alone with its limited resources cannot develop all the areas. The private initiatives had been manifested in various sphere of rural community development efforts.

The activities had largely been in the areas of the construction of roads, classroom, health centres, provision of pipe-borne water. Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Plays a crucial role in community development in Nigeria. These organisations often work in areas where government programmes have been inadequate or ineffective, providing essential services such as education, healthcare, vocational training or skill up programmes. For instance, Rochas Foundations and Dangote Foundations have implemented various programmes aimed at ameliorating poverty through education and healthcare interventions (Dangote, 2022).

On the international scene, international non-governmental organisations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation have been active in Nigeria, particularly in the areas of health care and education. These Organisations provide funding and technical support for projects aimed at improving the lives of the poor.

Despite the efforts of the government, private initiatives, and non-governmental organisations, numerous challenges continue to obstruct effective sustainable community development and poverty eradication in Nigeria. These obstacles can be traced to traditional development approaches, which are often top-down and externally driven, leading to limited success. As a result, there is an increasing need to explore innovative strategies that empower communities, utilize local resources, and integrate modern technology to promote Sustainable community development and eradicate Poverty in Nigeria. While these programmes had

some merits, none produced significant, lasting, or sustainable positive outcomes. Thus, this paper aims to explore innovative approaches to sustainable community development and poverty eradication.

## **Sustainable Community Development**

The word “Community” has received a global attention in Social Science literature. It is a controversial concept that has no single and generally accepted definition. It has become a universal umbrella for distinction, classification and identification of groups, people and professionals in all walks of life. The term “community” simply refers to a group of people residing in a specific geographical area who share common values, systems and practices.

According to Omoruyi (2001) the term Community can be seen as a group of people living within a specific geographical area such as a village, a town, a city, a neighbourhood or even a whole state. This suggests that there must be something that unites these individuals through shared interests.

A Community is also a group of people with diverse characteristics who are linked by social ties, share common perspectives and engaged in a joint action in a geographical location or setting (MacQueen, 2015). This collective effort is aimed at benefiting everyone, with the goal of improving the living standards of those residing in the community.

Regardless of how it is defined, a Community is made up of different constituencies, interacting groups and associations (Akande, 2016). Amid varying perspectives on what constitutes a community, the core idea should focus on collaborative efforts to address the identified issues within their locality. This underscores the importance of exploring the concept development as a critical element in community development.

Development is a process of social change in which new concepts are introduced into a social system to improve the living standard of the people. It involves the improvement of living conditions, the enhancement of individual and collective wellbeing, and the advancement of social structures to create more equitable and sustainable outcomes. Development is often measured by indicators such as increased access to education, healthcare, economic opportunities and social justice. It also encompasses the empowerment of communities and individuals to participate fully in the processes that affect their lives, ensuring that progress is inclusive and beneficial to all. Anyanwu (1999) Development, as emphasized by must be rooted in local resources; it cannot thrive on external support alone. This perspective forms the basis for discussing development in the context of Sustainable Community development in this paper.

Sustainable community development is a holistic approach that aims to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It focuses balancing economic growth, environmental Stewardship, and social equity. By integrating these three pillars, sustainable community development seeks to build resilient, self-sufficient communities that prosper in the long term. This approach encourages active participation from all community members, ensuring that inclusive, equitable and reflective of community’s unique needs and values. Through sustainable practices, communities can improve quality of life, protect natural resources and foster social cohesion.

The implication is that a lack of maintenance culture results in the collapse of social amenities and leads to infrastructural decay. To support this argument, Nwachukwu (2018) noted that in the 1980s many communities had functional pipe-borne water systems, but these systems are now non-existent. This suggests that there were no effective mechanisms established to ensure the sustainability of portable water provision. Currently, the government's approach to addressing this issue is the installation of boreholes to provide communities with access to clean drinking water.

It is concerning that the government and donor agencies responsible for providing social amenities and other infrastructural development projects fail to ensure their sustainability. This oversight calls into question their traditional top-down approach to community development, where those in power "knew" what the community needed and provide it for it as they saw fit. This approach has ultimately deprived Nigerian communities of the opportunities to achieve sustainable development (Aliwa, 2017).

This top-down approach has not only deprived Nigerians of the chance to participate in their own affairs but has also widened the gap between the rich and the poor, as well as between those in power and the community, in terms of access to quality Health care, education, infrastructure, and good governance. As a result, a significant number of Nigerians have been forced to live in abject poverty.

### **Poverty Eradication in Nigeria**

Poverty Eradication is the most difficult challenge facing Nigeria and its people and the greatest obstacle to pursuit of sustainable community development. In 2023, the poverty rate in Nigeria is estimated to have reached 38.97%, with approximately 87 million people living below the poverty line, making it the second largest poor population in the world after India (World Bank, 2023). This dire situation has, resulted in weak job creation and limited entrepreneurial opportunities, preventing the absorption of the 3.5million Nigerians entering the labour force annually. As a result, many workers have opted to emigrate in search of better prospects, a phenomenon locally referred to as the "japa" syndrome.

Poverty is a multi-dimensional issue explored through various concepts, and it reflects the levels of deprivation experienced by individuals, households, or communities. Fundamentally, poverty is a denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity. It means lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society. It means not having enough to feed and cloth(e) a family, not having a school or clinic to go to, not having the land on which to grow one's food or a job to earn one's living, not having access to credit. It means insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individual's households and communities. It means susceptibility to violence, and it often implies living on marginal or fragile environments without access to clean water or sanitation (UN,1998).

Poverty is typically divided into two categories: absolute poverty, which refers to the inability to satisfy basic necessities such as food, water, shelter, healthcare and relative poverty, where individuals or groups are considered poor compared to others within their society, often due to lack of access to similar living standards or opportunities (World Bank, 2018). Poverty can be understood not only as a lack of income but also as deprivation in other dimensions, including education, healthcare, clean water, employment opportunities. Poverty can be understood not only as a lack of income but also as deprivation in other dimensions,

including education, health care, clean water, employment opportunities. It results in reduced access to essential services and increased vulnerability to crisis and shocks, creating a cycle of disadvantage.

According to the National Planning Commission (2004), poverty in Nigeria manifests in various dimensions, including unemployment, over-indebtedness and economic dependency. Lack of personal freedom and the inability to meet basic needs for oneself and one's family. It also includes limited access to land, credit, savings, or asset ownership. The poor often live in unhygienic environments, which strain the physical surroundings and contribute to environmental degradation. Farmers and other poor groups receive their economic circumstances as highly uncertain, shaped by factors beyond their control, such as fluctuating commodity prices, unpredictable rainfall, pest infestation, fire outbreaks, changing soil conditions and social conflicts. A critical aspect of poverty is food insecurity, encapsulated in the saying "when hunger is removed from poverty, the burden of poverty becomes lighter".

### **Causes of Poverty**

Over half a century ago, the United Nations emerged as a symbol of hope in the aftermath of the Second World War and the preceding years of economic depression, social upheaval, and international tension. The global governance institutions that developed alongside the UN in the post-war era were partly a reaction to the failures of the 1930s and partly driven by an inspiring vision for the future. The resolve behind this vision was encapsulated in two simple words: "Never again. Never again should violence and conflict be allowed to devastate lives. Never again should poverty and mass unemployment be accepted. And never again should governments abandon their responsibility to protect the most fundamental social and economic rights of their citizens.

This vision has dimmed, becoming a global mirage—the vision of poverty eradication. According to DFID (2000), poverty persists in Nigeria due to resource mismanagement and corruption, particularly within, but not limited to, the public sector. The key is that improved governance is central to innovative approaches for sustainable community development and poverty eradication. The implication is that a strong, selfless and focused government works collaboratively to initiate and implement sustainable programmes that affect the lives and livelihoods of the people.

According to the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (2004), inadequate economic growth is the primary driver of poverty in Nigeria. This lack of growth is further exacerbated by the instability of the oil sector, which impacts various economic activities. Rising unemployment continues to increase the number of people living in poverty. Other contributing factors to poverty in Nigeria include challenges within the productive sector, widening income inequality, weak governance, social conflict, and issues related to gender, intersectoral dynamics, and the environment. Nigeria needs transition from a consumption-based economy to a productive one by leveraging technological advancements to foster innovative entrepreneurial skills among its people, promoting sustainable community development and poverty eradication. This will ultimately eliminate the challenges in the productive sector.

Challenges in the productive sector, particularly the limited growth of investment and technological innovation, have hindered the non-agricultural sector's ability to absorb,

especially in manufacturing. This shortfall has worsened poverty, particularly in urban areas (NEEDS, 2004).

According to NEEDS (2004), the response of successive administrations to poverty issues has largely been adhoc and uncoordinated initiatives such as Community banks, family support programmes, the National Directorate of Employment, the people's Bank, Better life For Rural Women, the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure, Sure-P, Skill-up, N-power and End Hunger and Code Nigeria programmes were launched by different governments to address various aspects of poverty, including Unemployment, lack of access to credit, and the gendered dimensions of poverty.

### **Innovative approaches to sustainable community development and poverty eradication**

Despite Nigeria's abundant resources, the country continues to grapple with high poverty rates and widespread social inequality. Implementing the following strategies is essential for fostering resilient communities, alleviating poverty, and achieving Long-term development goals in line with global sustainable development standards.

**Technology Integration:** The use of digital technology, in entrepreneurial skills acquisition, including mobile banking, e-agriculture platforms, and digital literacy programmes, has shown promise in enhancing economic opportunities for marginalized communities. For instance, mobile banking services have provided access to financial services for individuals in remote areas, enabling them to save money, access credit and start small businesses.

**Education and skill Development:** Education and Vocational training are crucial components of sustainable community development. Innovative programmes that focus on skill development, particularly for youth and women, have been instrumental in creating employment opportunities and promoting entrepreneurship. These programmes often incorporate digital literacy and technical skills that are in demand in the modern economy.

**Community-Based Initiatives:** Grass root movements and community-driven projects have proven effective in addressing specific local needs. Examples include cooperatives, Community saving groups (Adachi), community based organisation development initiatives which have empowered communities to take control of their development process.

**Micro finance and Social Enterprises:** Microfinance institutions and social enterprise have played a significant role in providing financial services to the poor, particularly women and rural populations. These institutions offer small loans and other financial products that enable individuals to start or expand small businesses, thereby improving their livelihoods and reducing poverty.

**Infrastructure Development:** Adequate infrastructure, including roads, electricity, and communication networks, is vital for community development. It facilitates trade, education and health care services, thereby contributing to economic growth and poverty reduction. The government and other stakeholders should invest more on infrastructures that impact the lives and livelihood of the people and make adequate provision for their maintenance.

**Environmental Sustainability:** Protecting the environment is key to sustainable community development. Initiatives that promote reforestation, sustainable land use, and renewable energy can help communities thrive while preserving natural resources for future generations.

**Good Governance and Anti-Corruption:** Transparent and accountable governance is crucial for the success of poverty eradication efforts combating corruption, ensuring the rule of law, and promoting civic participation can help create an environment where sustainable community development can flourish.

**Gender Equality and Women's Empowerments:** Addressing gender disparities and empowering women is vital for community development. Women play a significant role in the economy, and ensuring they have equal access to education, healthcare and economic opportunities can lead to substantial poverty reduction.

**Health Care Access:** Improving access to healthcare services, particularly in rural areas, is crucial for sustainable community development. Healthy communities are more productive and can contribute more effectively to the economy. Initiatives such as improving maternal health, combating infectious diseases, and providing clean water and sanitation are critical to sustainable community development.

**Policy Reforms and Institutional Support:** Effective governance and supportive policy frameworks, are essential for the success of sustainable community development initiatives. Although there have been recent reforms in Nigeria aimed at decentralizing development efforts, improving transparency, adherence to public complaints, granting full autonomy, independence to financial crime and corruption institutions to arrest and prosecute offenders and fostering public- private partnerships are crucial for creating an enabling environment for innovation and sustainable community development and poverty eradication.

**Security:** Security plays a crucial role in sustainable community development and poverty eradication, as it creates an environment where individuals and communities can thrive economically, socially, and politically. A secure environment ensures that people have access to education, healthcare, and other essential services that contribute to poverty eradication.

### **Challenges to innovative approaches to sustainable community development and poverty eradication**

Innovative approaches to sustainable community development and poverty eradication in Nigeria undoubtedly face significant challenges. Among the key obstacles identified are:

**Corruption:** Nigeria is often labelled as highly corrupt, with persistent corruption undermining development efforts by diverting resources away from those who need them most. Ironically, while many Nigerians condemn corruption, a culture of waiting for “one’s turn” to benefit from it prevails.

**Insecurity:** The current state of insecurity driven by bandits, Boko-Haram, unknown gunmen, and regional conflicts, severely disrupt community development initiatives and hampers efforts eradicate poverty, as no community will develop in a state of chaos, conflict and war.

**Population Growth:** Nigeria's rapid increasing population places immense pressure on available resources, making it difficult to effectively tackle poverty.

**Lack of political will:** Weak institutions and inadequate political will have hampered the implementation of government policies and programmes strengthening institutions like the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) and ensuring the Judiciary’s Independence are essential for achieving Sustainable Community development

### **Conclusion**

Achieving Sustainable Community development and poverty eradication in Nigeria demands holistic and well-coordinated approach across various sectors. Strategic investments in agriculture, infrastructure, education, skill development, and entrepreneurship are essential components of this effort. Equally, important is addressing the critical issues of environmental sustainability and governance reform. By focusing on these areas, Nigeria can make meaningful progress toward reducing poverty and fostering long-term, sustainable

community development. Collaboration among government, private sector, and civil society will be crucial in driving these efforts forward.

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