

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION IN BENDE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, ABIA STATE

ONONOGBU NGOZI

Department of Adult and Continuing Education
Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike

E-Mail: Ononogbu.ngozi@mouau.edu.ng

GSM: +2347066271150

Abstract

The study examined sustainable community development and poverty alleviation strategies in Bende LGA, Abia State. The study was guided by four research questions. The study adopted correlation research design with the population of 165 President Generals of all the town unions in the 13 communities that make up the study area. There was no sampling as the population was manageable by the researcher. The instrument for data collection were two questionnaire developed by the researcher titled Poverty Reduction Strategy Questionnaire (PRSQ) and Community Development Questionnaire (CDQ). The instruments were validated by two experts in the Department of Adult and Continuing Education and one from Measurement and Evaluation in the Department of Science Education all in Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike. The reliability of the instruments were 0.82 and 0.78 for each cluster and the overall reliability coefficient index of 0.82 which was established using Cronbach's Alpha Statistics. The research questions were answered using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) while the null hypotheses were analysed using Linear regression at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that there was a high positive correlation between community participation, entrepreneurship, skill acquisition and women empowerment and community development in Bende LGA, Abia State. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that Local government and development organizations should promote active community participation in decision-making processes. This can be achieved by establishing forums where community members contribute to identifying development needs and proposing solutions. When communities take ownership of projects, there is a greater chance of successful implementation and sustainability, also the promotion of local entrepreneurship is essential for economic development in Bende LGA among others.

Keywords: Sustainable Community Development, Poverty, Poverty Alleviation Strategies.

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Introduction

Sustainable community development and poverty alleviation are central to achieving equitable growth and social inclusion, particularly in rural areas like Bende Local Government Area (LGA). Bende, comprising thirteen communities including Alayi, Bende, Ezeukwu, Igbere, Item, Itumbuzo, Nkpa, Ntalakwu, Ozuitem, Ugwueke, Umu-imenyi, Umuhu-Ezechi, and Uzuakoli, is predominantly agrarian, with agriculture serving as the mainstay of the local economy. Despite its rich cultural heritage and agricultural potentials, Bende LGA faces persistent challenges of poverty, underdevelopment, and limited access to essential services (Attamah, Aguh, and Agwu, 2023).

Sustainable community development has emerged as a crucial framework for addressing poverty, which remains a pervasive challenge in many parts of the world. Unlike traditional development models that often prioritize short-term economic gains, sustainable community development emphasizes a balanced integration of economic progress, environmental stewardship, and social equity (Nwachukwu, 2018). The underlying assumption is that lasting improvements in living standards must be built on foundations that respect the environment, ensure equitable access to resources, and empower local populations. Thus, sustainable

community development provides the strategic lens through which poverty can be meaningfully tackled in Bende LGA.

In Nigeria, poverty is a multidimensional issue characterized by lack of access to basic needs, education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. According to Okodudu (2021), about 70% of Nigerian youths are either unemployed or underemployed, contributing to high poverty levels nationwide. Bende LGA mirrors this national trend, with residents facing inadequate educational facilities, limited vocational opportunities, and underutilized agricultural potential (African Journals of Educational Research and Development, 2021).

Within the framework of sustainable community development, several strategies have been identified as key drivers of poverty alleviation. Community participation ensures that development initiatives are contextually relevant and locally owned. According to Attamah et al. (2023), active participation fosters ownership, accountability, and transparency. Traditional modes of communication such as community meetings and town criers remain instrumental in mobilizing people and resources. Entrepreneurship also serves as a catalyst for job creation and innovation. In Bende, agricultural entrepreneurship has gained prominence, particularly among youths, thereby enhancing food security and providing sustainable livelihoods (Ogbari et al., 2024).

Similarly, skill acquisition equips individuals with competencies for self-reliance. Vocational trainings and initiatives such as the Nigeria for Women Project (NFWP) have enhanced employability and entrepreneurial potential, particularly among women and young people (Okodudu, 2021; Badaru & Adedoyin, 2021). Women empowerment is equally central to sustainable development. In Bende, women contribute significantly to governance, education, and healthcare. Initiatives such as Tech Africa's digital literacy programmes have enabled women to participate effectively in the digital economy, thereby strengthening both household welfare and community resilience (Iheukwumere & Obiozor, 2025).

These strategies are not separate from poverty alleviation but are in fact the sustainable pathways through which poverty can be reduced in Bende. However, the lack of a comprehensive and integrated approach has left the area vulnerable to cycles of deprivation and environmental degradation. Existing programmes often overlook the synergy between community participation, entrepreneurship, skill acquisition, and women empowerment, resulting in low income levels, unemployment, and poor living conditions.

In view of this gap, this study investigates the extent to which community participation, entrepreneurship, skill acquisition, and women empowerment conceived as sustainable community development strategies contribute to poverty alleviation and community development in Bende LGA of Abia State.

Statement of the Problem

Bende Local Government Area (LGA) in Abia State has long been burdened by high levels of poverty, underdevelopment, and inadequate access to basic services such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure. Despite the region's significant agricultural potential, poor infrastructure, outdated farming techniques, and limited support for local entrepreneurship have hindered economic growth and stifled opportunities for community advancement. Many poverty reduction strategies implemented in the area have failed to address these underlying issues, as they often emphasized short-term relief measures such as palliative distributions,

seasonal subsidies, or donor-driven interventions, rather than long-term, sustainable solutions that build local capacity.

This lack of a comprehensive and sustainable approach has left Bende LGA vulnerable to recurring cycles of poverty and environmental degradation. Existing poverty alleviation programmes frequently neglect crucial components such as community participation, entrepreneurship, skill acquisition, and women empowerment. These are not merely supplementary activities but represent core strategies of sustainable community development that, when effectively integrated, can transform communities. Unfortunately, in Bende they have often been underutilized, poorly coordinated, or treated as secondary to externally driven interventions.

The urgency of the problem lies in the fact that poverty in Bende is not only persistent but also deepening, with adverse consequences for youth employment, women's economic empowerment, and community resilience. If unaddressed, these challenges will continue to undermine the region's agricultural potential and exacerbate social inequalities. While sustainable community development has been widely acknowledged in literature as a framework for inclusive growth, there remains a clear research gap in understanding how its strategies particularly community participation, entrepreneurship, skill acquisition, and women empowerment operate within the specific socio-economic context of Bende LGA.

This study therefore seeks to fill that gap by investigating the extent to which these strategies correlate with community development outcomes in Bende. By doing so, it aims to provide evidence-based insights into whether strengthening these sustainable development strategies can enhance long-term poverty alleviation and break the cycle of deprivation in the area.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between poverty reduction strategies and community development in Bende LGA, Abia State.

Specifically, the study sought to:

Determine the relationship between community participation and community development in Bende LGA, Abia State.

Find out the relationship between entrepreneurship and community development in Bende LGA, Abia State.

Ascertain the relationship between skill acquisition and community development in Bende LGA, Abia State.

Establish the relationship between women empowerment and community development in Bende LGA, Abia State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study.

- i. What is the relationship between community participation and poverty alleviation in Bende LGA, Abia State?
- ii. What is the relationship between entrepreneurship and poverty alleviation in Bende LGA, Abia State?

- iii. What is the relationship between skill acquisition and poverty alleviation in Bende LGA, Abia State?
- iv. What is the relationship between women empowerment and poverty alleviation in Bende LGA, Abia State?

Hypotheses

- H0₁: There is no significant correlation between community participation and poverty alleviation in Bende Local Government Area, Abia State.
- H0₂: There is no significant correlation between entrepreneurship and poverty alleviation in Bende Local Government Area, Abia State.
- H0₃: There is no significant correlation between skill acquisition and poverty alleviation in Bende Local Government Area, Abia State.
- H0₄: There is no significant correlation between women empowerment and poverty alleviation in Bende Local Government Area, Abia State.

Methodology

The study adopted the correlational research design. According to Asogwa, Onah and Gideon (2020) a correlational design investigates relationship between variables without the researcher controlling or manipulating any of them. The study was conducted in Bende LGA of Abia State. The population of the study was 165 Presidents General of all the Town Unions in 13 communities of the study area. There was no sampling as the population was manageable by the researcher. This is because according to Asogwa, Onah and Gideon (2020), when the population of the study to which the researcher intend to study is manageable no sampling should be considered, the whole population should be studied. . The instrument for data collection were two structured questionnaire developed by the researcher titled Poverty Reduction Strategies Questionnaire (PRSQ) and Community Development Questionnaire (CDQ) were developed by the researcher for data collection. The instruments were validated by two experts in the Department of Adult and Continuing Education and one from Measurement and Evaluation in the Department of Science Education all in Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike. Cronbach's Alpha statistic was used determine the internal consistency of the instrument and reliability co-efficient index of 0.82 & 0.78 for each cluster and the overall reliability coefficient index of 0.82 was obtained and considered reliable for the study. A total of 165 copies of the questionnaire were administered by the researcher and 5 briefed research assistants through direct delivery and retrieval method and were all retrieved. The research questions were answered using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC). While the null hypotheses were tested using linear regression at 0.05 level of significance. The extent or strength of relationship of the variables was decided or interpreted using Creswell (2008) correlation coefficient scale with +0.70-1.00 indicating strong/high extent, + 0.30-0.69 indicating moderate/medium extent and + 0.000-0.29 indicating none to weak/low extent. Creswell (2008) opined that correlation coefficient can range from -1.00 to +1.00 with positive numbers used to identify a positive relationship and negative numbers being used to identify a negative relationship. Linear association is indicated with a correlation coefficient of 0.00. More so, null hypotheses were rejected if P-value is greater than the alpha value of 0.05 level and otherwise the null hypotheses was not rejected.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the extent of the relationship between community participation activities such as involvement in decision-making, attendance at community meetings, contribution of local resources, and use of indigenous communication channels and poverty alleviation in Bende LGA of Abia State?

Data for answering research question 1 are presented in Table 1

Table 1: Correlation Matrix of Relationship between Community Participation and Poverty Alleviation in Bende LGA, Abia State.

		CP	PA
CP	Pearson	1	.887
	Sig (2-tailed)		.000
	N	578	578
	R ²	(0.787)	
PA	Pearson	.887	1
	Sig (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	578	578
		79%	

CP: Community Participation, PA: Poverty Alleviation

The data in Table 1 reveals a correlation (r) of .881, which is positive and falls within the coefficient range of 0.80 and above, indicating a very high extent of relationship. This result shows that entrepreneurship, particularly through activities such as agribusiness ventures, vocational start-ups, small-scale trading, business training, and access to credit, relates to poverty alleviation to a very high extent. The coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.776 indicates that about 78% of the variance in poverty alleviation can be accounted for by entrepreneurship.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant correlation between community participation and poverty alleviation in Bende Local Government Area, Abia State

Data for testing hypothesis 1 are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Regression analysis of extent of relationship between community participation and poverty alleviation in Bende LGA

Model	Sum of square	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Regression	21167.590	1	21167.590	318.19848	.000 ^b
Residual	38317.833	576	66.524		
Total	59485.423	577			

The data in Table 2 reveal a probability (P) –value of 0.00 which is less than the alpha value of 0.05. Since the P-value is less than 0.05 alpha value, the hypothesis of no significant relationship was rejected and the alternate upheld. Therefore, community participation relates to poverty alleviation.

Research Question 2: What is the extent of relationship between entrepreneurship and poverty alleviation in Bende LGA of Abia State?

Data for answering research question 2 are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Correlation Matrix of Relationship between Entrepreneurship and Poverty Alleviation in Bende LGA, Abia State.

		ENT	CD
ENT	Pearson	1	.881
	Sig (2-tailed)		.000
	N	578	578
	R ²	(0.776)	
		79%	
CD	Pearson	.881	1
	Sig (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	578	578

ENT = Entrepreneurship, CD = Community Development

The data in Table 4.3 reveals a correlation @ of .881 which is positive and within the coefficient range of 0.80 and above indicating very high extent relationship. This result indicates that entrepreneurship to a very high extent, relates with poverty alleviation. The coefficient of determination (R²) of 0.776 indicates that 78% of poverty alleviation could be accounted for by entrepreneurship.

Data for testing hypothesis 2 are presented in Table 4.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant correlation between entrepreneurship and community development in Bende Local Government Area, Abia State.

Table 4: Regression analysis of extent of relationship between community participation and community development in Bende LGA

Model	Sum of square	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Regression	24148.405	1	24148.405	811.220	.000 ^b
Residual	17146.622	576	29.768		
Total	158850.556	577			

Data in Table 4 shows a P-value of 0.00 which is less than the alpha value of 0.05, the hypothesis of no significant relationship was rejected. Therefore, entrepreneurship relates poverty alleviation.

Research Question 3: What is the extent of relationship between skill acquisition and community development in Bende LGA of Abia State?

Data for answering research question 3 are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Correlation Matrix of Relationship between skill acquisition and Poverty Alleviation in Bende LGA, Abia State.

		SA	PA
SA	Pearson	1	.732
	Sig (2-tailed)		.000
	N	578	578
	R ²	(0.536)	

		54%	
PA	Pearson	.732	1
	Sig (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	578	578

SA = Skill Acquisition, PA = Poverty Alleviation

Data in Table 4.5 shows a correlation coefficient of 0.732 which is positive and falls within the correlation coefficient of 0.60 and 0.80 indicating high extent relationship. This result indicates that skill acquisition to a high extent relates to poverty alleviation. The coefficient of determination (R²) of 0.536 indicates that 54% of poverty alleviation could be accounted for by skill acquisition.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant correlation between skill acquisition and community development in Bende Local Government Area, Abia State

Data for testing hypothesis 3 are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Regression analysis of extent of relationship between skill acquisition and poverty alleviation in Bende LGA

Model	Sum of square	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Regression	37991.300	1	27991.546	424.655	.000 ^b
Residual	51531.432	576	189.464		
Total	89522.732	577			

The data below in Table 4.6 shows a P-value of 0.00 which is less than the alpha value of 0.05. This implied that the hypothesis of no significant relationship earlier stated was rejected and alternate upheld. Therefore, skill acquisition relates to poverty alleviation in Bende LGA. Research Question 4: What is the extent of relationship between women empowerment and community development in Bende LGA of Abia State?

Table 7: Correlation Matrix of Relationship between Women Empowerment and Poverty Alleviation in Bende LGA, Abia State.

		WE	PA
WE	Pearson	1	.775
	Sig (2-tailed)		.000
	N	578	578
	R ²	(0.600)	
PA	Pearson	.775	1
	Sig (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	578	578

WE = Women Empowerment, PA = Poverty Alleviation

The data in Table 4.7 reveal a correlation (r) coefficient of 0.775 which is positive and falls within the correlation coefficient range of 6.0 and 8.0 indicating high extent relationship. This result implies that women empowerment to a high extent relates with poverty alleviation in Bende LGA. The coefficient of determination (R²) of 0.600 indicates that 60% of poverty alleviation could be accounted for by women empowerment.

Hypothesis 4: There is no significant correlation between skill acquisition and community development in Bende Local Government Area, Abia State.

Data for testing hypothesis 4 was presented in Table 8.

Table 8: Regression analysis of extent of relationship between women empowerment and poverty alleviation in Bende LGA.

Model	Sum of square	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Regression	22753.810	1	22753.810	297.144	.000 ^b
Residual	44107.151	576	76.575		
Total	66860.961	577			

WE = Women Empowerment, PA = Poverty Alleviation

The data in Table 4.8 indicates a P-value of 0.00 which is less than the alpha level of 0.05. This implies that the null hypothesis was rejected and alternate hypothesis accepted. Therefore, women empowerment significantly relates to poverty alleviation.

Discussion of the Findings

The analysis of Research Question One revealed a significant high positive relationship between community participation and poverty alleviation in Bende LGA, Abia State. This finding aligns with Ukah, Akor and Oluoha (2020), who established that community participation enhances socio-economic development in rural areas by ensuring that projects are locally owned and contextually relevant. Similarly, Attamah et al. (2023) observed that inactive participation of community members was a major driver of underdevelopment in Bende LGA, further underscoring the importance of inclusive involvement. In the same vein, Ogbari et al. (2024) reported that rural development projects in Nassarawa State often failed when local communities were excluded from planning and execution, but where participation was active, projects were sustainable and poverty levels reduced. These findings suggest that in Bende, community participation contributes to poverty alleviation by promoting transparency, strengthening accountability, mobilizing local resources, and fostering a sense of ownership that ensures the sustainability of development interventions.

The analysis of Research Question Two showed a significant high positive relationship between entrepreneurship and poverty alleviation in Bende LGA. This finding corroborates Ogbari et al. (2024), who argued that promoting entrepreneurship fosters sustainable development by creating job opportunities, stimulating innovation, and expanding income sources. Similarly, Attamah et al. (2023) revealed that entrepreneurship improved the standard of living in Cross River State by reducing unemployment, enhancing local resource utilization, and curbing rural–urban migration. In the case of Bende, entrepreneurial activities particularly in agribusiness, small-scale trading, and vocational start-ups provide alternative livelihoods, diversify household income, and reduce dependence on subsistence farming. This implies that entrepreneurship alleviates poverty not just by providing jobs, but by equipping individuals with the tools to become self-reliant and drivers of local economic growth.

The analysis of Research Question Three revealed a significant high positive relationship between skill acquisition and poverty alleviation in Bende LGA. This finding is consistent with Okodudu (2021), who emphasized that human empowerment through skills directly

correlates with poverty reduction. Ogbari et al. (2024) further noted that skill acquisition supports technological advancement and entrepreneurial readiness in a globalized economy. In Bende, vocational training equips individuals especially youth and women with competencies needed to establish small enterprises, enhance employability, and engage productively in local industries. The implication is that skill acquisition reduces poverty by improving labor market outcomes, promoting innovation in agriculture and business, and enabling households to generate sustainable income streams.

The analysis of Research Question Four revealed a significant high positive relationship between women empowerment and poverty alleviation in Bende LGA. This aligns with Iheukwumere and Obiozor (2025), who demonstrated that women empowerment significantly contributes to poverty reduction and economic development in Nigeria. Women's access to education, skills, credit, and social protection enhances their ability to support household income and community development. Similarly, Badaru and Adedoyin (2021) found that empowered women actively contribute to solving problems in their immediate environment and sustaining community growth. In Bende, women's empowerment translates into greater participation in governance, healthcare, education, and entrepreneurship. This reduces poverty by ensuring inclusive decision-making, enhancing family welfare, and multiplying the community's productive capacity through the full utilization of women's talents and resources.

Conclusion

Sustainable community development holds the key to addressing the entrenched poverty experienced in Bende Local Government Area (LGA) of Abia State. The challenges of poverty, underdevelopment, and limited access to essential services in the area require a multifaceted approach that integrates economic growth, environmental sustainability, and social inclusion. By focusing on community participation, entrepreneurship, skill acquisition, and women empowerment, Bende can create a foundation for long-term development and poverty alleviation. Community-driven initiatives that harness local resources and talents can empower individuals to improve their livelihoods, while sustainable practices ensure that development benefits future generations.

Recommendations

1. Local government and development organizations should institutionalize mechanisms that go beyond ad-hoc consultations and ensure continuous, structured participation of communities in project planning, execution, and monitoring. For example, community development committees should be given decision-making authority in local budgeting and project prioritization. This approach addresses the identified problem of top down development efforts in Bende that often fail due to lack of ownership and accountability.
2. Entrepreneurship promotion in Bende should move beyond general advocacy and focus on tailored support for existing strengths, especially agriculture and agro-processing. The local government should partner with microfinance institutions to design loan schemes with flexible repayment tailored to rural entrepreneurs. In addition, incubation hubs should be established to provide business mentorship, access to markets, and technology for small businesses.
3. Skill acquisition programs should not only provide training in trades such as tailoring, carpentry, and ICT but also be directly linked to employment opportunities and

market demand. For instance, agricultural extension services should include training in mechanized farming and value-chain processing to replace outdated subsistence methods that trap households in poverty. This would directly address the identified problem of unemployment and underemployment in Bende, while equipping residents to participate competitively in the regional economy.

4. The government should address barriers that limit women's access to productive resources in Bende, such as land ownership restrictions, limited access to finance, and exclusion from leadership. Programs should go beyond generic empowerment workshops to include enforceable policies granting women equal access to land, agricultural inputs, and local government decision-making platforms. This directly responds to the identified gap in Bende where women, despite being central to agriculture and family welfare, remain marginalized. By dismantling these barriers, women can become active contributors to household income, entrepreneurship, and governance, thereby accelerating community-wide poverty reduction.

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