

## The Role of Community Development Programmes in Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria: Lessons from Onelga, Rivers State, Nigeria

Agwu Ositadimma Ambrose<sup>1</sup> --- Iton Enobong Etim<sup>2</sup> --- Enagu, Francis Mgbe<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>E-Library/GST Department, Abia State University Uturu, Abia State, Nigeria

<sup>2,3</sup>Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Uyo, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

(✉ Corresponding Author)

### ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the role of community development programmes in poverty alleviation in ONELGA, Rivers State. The study was induced by the level of poverty prevalence among the rural dwellers in ONELGA community despite the abundance of natural resources, complimented by the efforts made by the government to improve the living condition of the people in the rural areas. It was geared toward finding out whether implementation of community based projects in the area has had any significant improvement in the lives and standard of living of people in ONELGA. Data collected from this survey research was from two strata using stratified method where 500 respondents were selected through multistage and snowball sampling method. The questionnaire was also used and administered; the data collected was analyzed through simple percentage and represented in charts. The study found that effective implementation of community based programmes has capacity to impact positively on the lives of ONELGA people. It was then recommended that government should embark on more community development programmes to reduce the level of poverty in the rural areas and to help in funding and completion of community development projects to improve the living conditions of the rural people in ONELGA.

**Keywords:** Community development programmes, Poverty alleviation, Community development association, Developmental projects.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Rural poverty and poor living standard are twin evils, which have bedeviled Africa and Nigeria in particular. Poverty normally has the effect of narrowing the horizons of possibility. It saps energy not only for physical work but for opening the mind to developmental opportunities. In Nigeria, the general pattern of rural poverty includes low farm income resulting from poor yield, static production technology, inefficient production system and inadequate infrastructural facilities (Ering, 2006). Poverty as it were is an indication of under-development

and that is why, most of the underdeveloped nations are the worst hit by poverty and suffering. Rural poverty is not just a shortage of material goods, it is usually part of a syndrome, which includes low status in community, lack of influence, hunger, economic and political dependence and insecure or irregular sources of income (Farinde, Okunade and Laogun, 2004).

In the society, people are said to be poor when their standard of living falls below the societal set standard, while in other cases it is because of the absence of basic necessities of life that they are said to be poor. This is reflected in the description of income and human poverty in Udoms (2016) where income poverty is consequence upon paltry income at ones dispose inability to acquire/afford which may lead to human poverty defined as inability to participate in decisions regarding governance etc. It follows therefore that the extent of poverty among the people of ONELGA is alarming and has seriously hindered the development capacity of the people resulting in poor sources of drinking water, inadequate social infrastructural and recreational facilities. In addition, the shortage of clean drinking water, health and medical facilities, bad road, and poor socio-economic status are obvious outcome of poverty in the land (Mills, 2005). There is also the issue of susceptibility to disease because of inadequate nutrition.

One of the major indices of development is the reduction of widespread absolute poverty in the society (Ering 2006). Poverty alleviation is a pre-condition for a nation's development because it involves major transformation of the lower and middle class above the poverty level. However, it has become a common knowledge that the government alone cannot provide the needed economic development and human welfare packages to alleviate poverty. This may result from limited resources or nonchalant attitude and greediness of the leadership involved in running the government at the local, state and federal levels. Thus, the involvement of the people directly or indirectly in developmental projects has the prospects of hastening the rate of poverty alleviation in rural community (Ottong, 2003).

Community development occurs when people strengthen the bounds within their neighborhoods, build social networks, and form their own organizations to provide a long-term capacity for problem solving (Udoye, 2002). Community members who have the capacity to do something to enhance their quality of life are portrayed as having the ability to think, to decide, to plan and to take action in determining their lives. It is often argued that, in any community development programme both economic and individual growth must be given equal attention so as to ensure that the process of community development achieves its due balance, continuity and sustainability.

Community participation in developmental programmes involves active involvement of the community members in particular projects geared towards the development of an area. Such projects may be executed by a group of people, individuals, agencies and sometimes the government. The participation may be in cash or kind and due to various factors such as age, income level and social status, the level of participation by individuals may vary. Community development projects include the social and infrastructural facilities such as construction of roads, bore holes, building of community centers (or town halls), police posts, schools, markets, recreational centers, etc. The main purpose of community development projects is to organize, develop and utilize available resources and manpower. These resources are utilized in such a way that the entire rural population depending on them has opportunity to meet their basic needs along with reasonable facilities for education and health. This promotes a positive and healthy environment.

It may be stated that the current improvement in rural transformation in Nigeria results from the participation of community members in community projects. Many rural areas have been enjoying some of the infrastructural facilities like health, education water and electricity supplies. The complementary efforts of the government after the community members have initiated the projects have great potentials of solving problems associated with poverty and development in Nigeria.

The need for self-help projects that will enhance community development in developing countries evolved from the inability of the government to provide all the social and economic needs of the populace (Muoghalu, 2002). The provision of the socio-economic needs will directly influence the poverty level thus, leading to improvement in the living standards of the rural populace. The approaches to community development in Nigeria are in 2 levels: governmental and the local people's levels. At the governmental level, community development is handled through a multi-purpose approach. This involves an attempt at developing rural areas by coordinating the extension services of various ministries and integrating the people's organized self-help effort with the specialized services of the government and voluntary agencies. On the other hand, at the people's level, community development in Nigeria is tackled through the self-help approach mainly.

Therefore, to reduce the poverty level, Okpala, (2008) argued the rate of involvement of community members must be very high. Hence, the goal of embarking on projects is not only to meet the immediate needs of the people but such projects must have a lasting future value on the dwellers with a view to curtailing population drift and poverty. This will help to reduce endemic social misery in most towns and permit equitable distribution of economic activities within the country.

The scourge of poverty and its negative effects on the people of ONELGA communities is evidenced in the paucity of infrastructural facilities in the communities. There is little or no functional clinics to cater for the health of the people especially pregnant women resulting in high maternal mortality rate, and increased malaria infection. Ill-equipped and poorly managed public schools have adverse effect on people educational capability in the area.

The prevalence and the effect of poverty in the society have led to a number of strategies and programmes initiated by government at various levels (Federal, State and Local Government). Some of the most recent programmes include: Micro-Finance Banks (MFBs), Family Support Programmes (FSP), Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs), Community Banks (CB), Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme (ACGS), River Basin Development Programme, National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), and "Nigeria Vision 20:20" among others. It is however disturbing that in spite of these developmental emphases to transform rural populace and the economy, ONELGA still swims in the ocean of economic retrogression. Taking a look at the failure of past poverty alleviation programmes and community development programmes in ONELGA suggest that lasting solution to the problem is imperative.

However, it has not been empirically ascertained whether or not these programmes have positively affected the standard of living of the people of ONELGA Communities. If they actually have not impacted positively, then the need to find out the factors that could be responsible for the ugly situation and what remedial steps to take has ideally become empirically crucial. In addition, the success of a community developmental effort depends on effective participation of community members among other things (Ozor and Nwankwo, 2008). When people participate fully, they tend to own the projects and jealously guide to ensure

their success. Yet, it appears not much consideration has been made to empirically investigate the level of participation of ONELGA Communities members in these programmes. These issues provide the motivation for this study by examining the effects of community development programmes on poverty alleviation in ONELGA in Rivers State.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This paper adopted the exploratory survey design. Survey design was used in this study for its economy, rapid data collection and ability to understand the characteristics of the population under study (Sekaran, 2011). In addition, the survey design was deployed to collect data from a defined population in order to describe the present condition of the population using the prescribed variables. Community development programmes constituted the independent variables in this study while poverty alleviation was considered the dependent variable. According to accessible records from the National population commission, the total population of adult male and female residents based on 2006 population census is 283,294, using the multi-staged sampling technique, 500 respondents were selected for the study sample. Employing a dichotomous questionnaire comprising multiple choice options and likert type statements to collect data, simple percentage was used to analyse the collected data in order to realize the paper objectives.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Data on Table 1 shows the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents. As indicated, the total number of respondents was 500 constituting 24.0% male and 76.0% female. Thus, it can be deduced from the result that the views being expressed in this study are representative of both male and female respondents with female respondents in majority. Among the respondents 170 representing 34% are married, 130 respondents representing 26% are single, while 80 respondent representing 16% are widows. However, 65 respondents representing 13% are widowers, while 55 respondents or 11% represents the divorced category. It depicts further that respondents who are married constitute the highest population of the area with a percentage of 34%.

On the basis of educational qualification, respondents consist of 230 First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC) holders, representing 46%. 140 respondents representing 28% have SSCE/GCE, 70 respondents representing 14% have NCE/ND, while 60 respondents representing 12% have degrees. It shows that respondents that have (FSLC) First School Leaving Certificate constitute the highest population with a percentage of 46%. This simply suggests that most respondents were well educated to understand the issues at stake and to contribute accordingly.

Table 1 also shows that 9% were between 20- 30years, 21.0% were between 31-40years, 27.8% were between 41-50years, 30.6% were between 51-60 years and 11.0% were 61years and above. Thus, majority of respondents were between 41-50 years old. In addition, results also reveal that 28.7% of respondents have less than 5 years of working experience, 23.0% of respondents have worked between 6-10years, 11.0% of respondents have 11-15years experience, and 35.0% have 16years and above job experience with their organization/employers. From this result, it can be inferred that greater majority of respondents have over five

years. Thus, respondents are knowledgeable on the subject matter of this study and responded appropriately to the items on the research instrument.

Some respondents were Christian (54.2%), some were Muslim (44.4%), and the remaining 1.4% of respondents belongs to other non-dominant indigenous religious groups. In addition, occupational distribution of respondents shows 230 respondents representing 46% are engaged in farming, 130 respondents representing 26% are engaged in trading, 20 respondents representing 4% are engaged in fishing, 75 respondents representing 15% are civil servants, while 45 respondents representing 9% are others. It further portrays that respondents who are engaged in farming constitute the highest population with a percentage of 46%. The study cut across many occupational divides.

**Table-1.** Respondents' Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Demographic Characteristics	Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	120	24.0
	Female	380	76.0
Age of Respondent	20-30years	48	9.0
	31-40years	105	21.0
	41-50years	139	27.8
	51-60yrs	153	30.6
	61yrs & above	55	11.0
Working Experience	1-5years	172	28.7
	6-10 years	143	23.0
	10-15 years	70	11.0
	16 yrs and above	213	35.0
Highest Qualification	FSLC/WAEC	230	21.0
	OND/NCE	82	5.6
	HND/B.SC/B.A	107	75.4
	M.SC/MBA	240	26.9
Marital Status	Married	77	54.2
	Single	65	45.8
Religion	Christianity	77	54.2
	Islam	63	44.4
	Others	2	1.4
Occupation	Farming	230	46.0
	Trading	130	26.0
	Fishing	20	4.0
	Civil Servant	75	15.0
	Others	45	9.0

Source: Field Survey, 2015

### 3.2. Nature and Characteristic of Community Development Programmes in ONELGA

It is necessary to find out the characteristics or type of community development programs currently operating and functioning in ONELGA. To that extent, results in figure 1, 2 and 3 shows the distributing of responds on the nature of CDP in terms of agricultural projects, educational projects, and Health/medical related programs.



Fig-1. Nature and types of CDP in ONELGA

Source: Field Survey: 2015

As can be observed from fig 1, majority of respondents (30.8%) stated that drilling of boreholes for drinking water constitutes the major and functioning project in ONELGA. This is followed by Construction of irrigation dam for farm purposes (22.8%), fish farming projects (12.3%), fertilizer distribution (10.9%), Fadama project (10.1%) construction of market stall (5.3%) in that order respectively. Thus, it can be deduced from the results that several programs that tend to enhance agricultural activities and boost food supply and food sufficiency are currently being implemented in the communities under study.

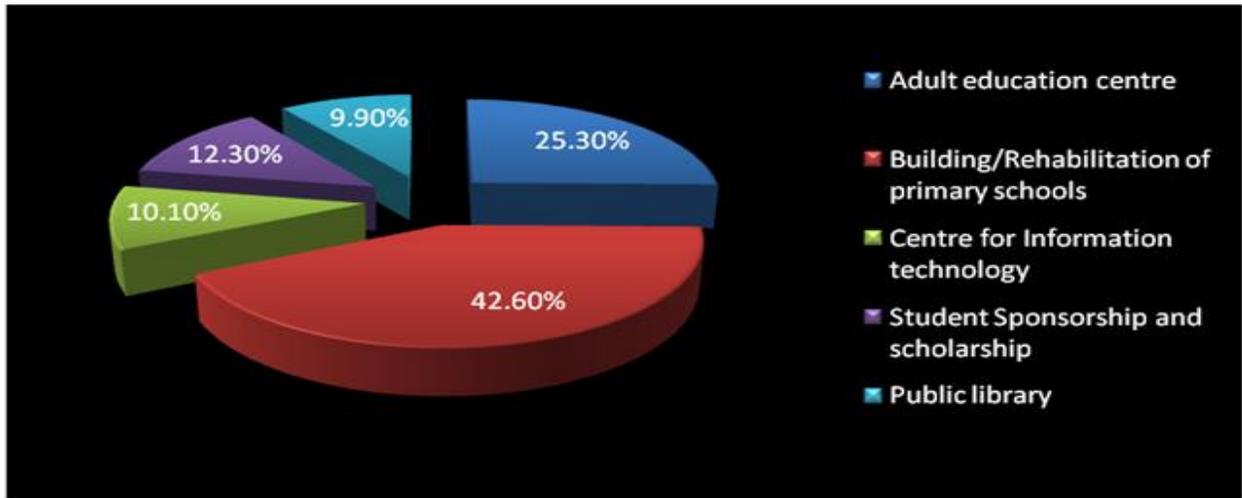


Fig-2. Educational Programmes in ONELGA

Source: Field Survey: 2014

In figure 2, 42.60% of respondents were of the opinion that building and rehabilitation of primary schools is the major on-going project in ONELGA. In addition, 25.3% went for adult education program, 12.3% said it is

students' sponsorship and scholarship, 10.1% and 9.9% of respondents selected the building of Centre for information technology, and building public library respectively. This implies that in ONELGA, there exists some community based programs that facilitate education and learning such as primary schools, adult education Centre, and Computer Centre (ICT) public library etc.

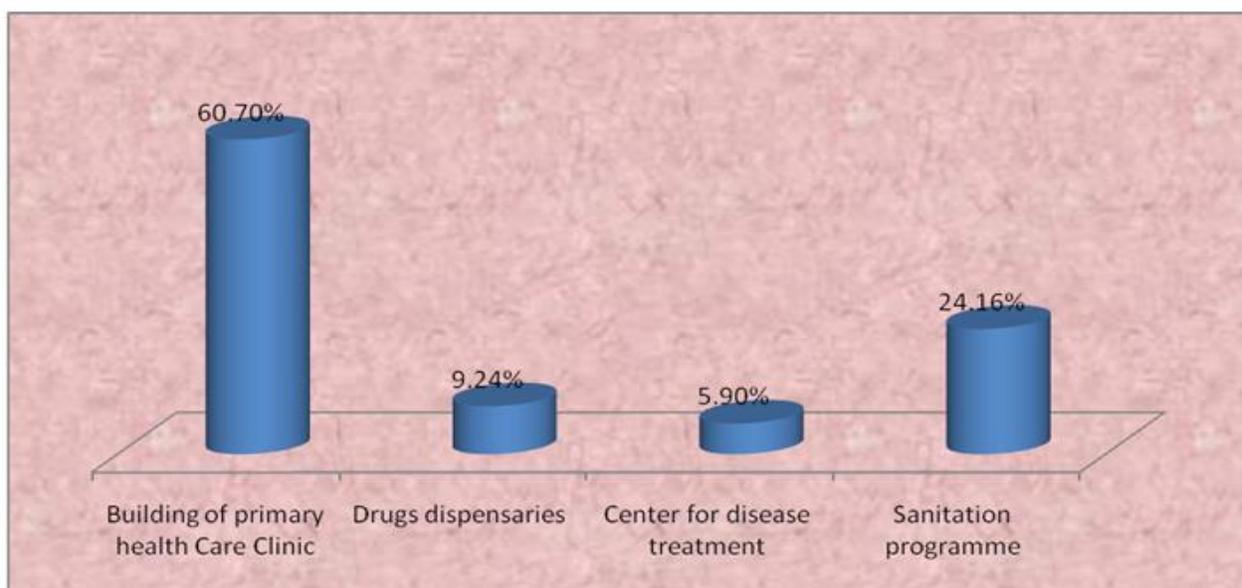


Fig-3. Health- Care Programmes in ONELGA

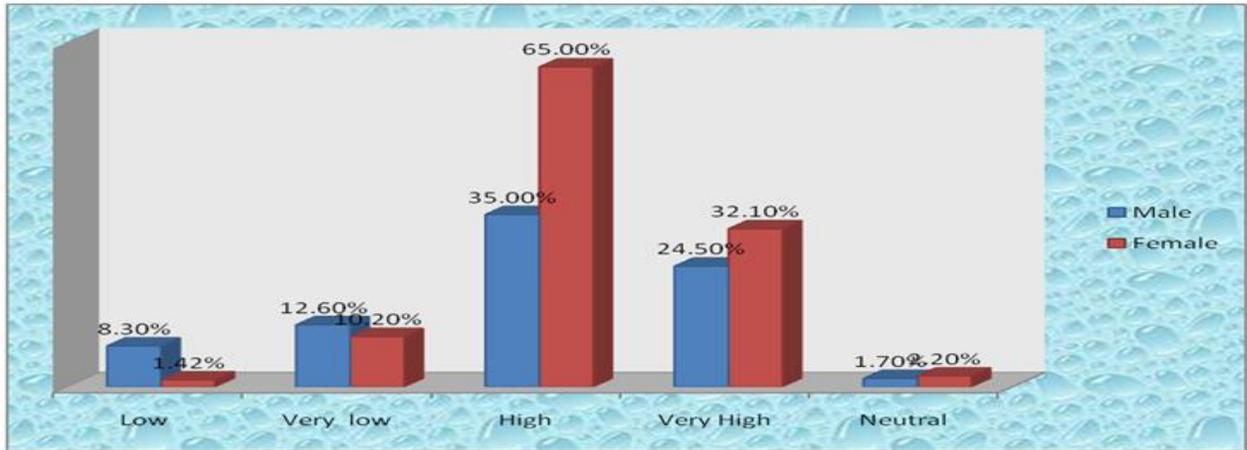
Source: Field Survey: 2015

In terms of health related programs, building of primary health centre with 60.7% of respondents top the list of projects in ONELGA. This is followed by sanitation based programs to keep the environment clean (24.16%), Drug dispensing units (9.24%) and centre for disease control (5.9%) was the least among the health based projects.

In sum, it appears that three categories of community based programs exist in ONELGA in Rivers State namely: projects that enhance agriculture and boost food sufficiency, projects that enhance educational and knowledge capacity of Onelga people, and programs that ensure healthy living and increase life span of the people.

### 3.3. Level of People's Participation in Community Development Programmes at ONELGA

It has been earlier stated that barring all other factors, the success of a community developmental effort depends on effective participation of community members. When people participate fully, they tend to own the projects and jealously guide to ensure their success. With this in mind, the analysis in this section sought to ascertain the level of participation of residents in projects carried out in ONELGA. Results of data analysis are as shown in figure 4.



**Fig-4.** Extent of respondents' participation in community development programmes in ONELGA

Source: : Field Survey: 2015

Respondent's participation in CDP was categorized into four: low, very low, high, and very high. From the results shown on figure 4, female respondents (65.0%) had highest level of participation and 35% of the male counterparts also indicated high participation in CDP in ONELGA. Result also revealed that 1.4% of female respondents and 8.3% of the male counterparts had low level of participation respectively. Thus it may be implied that a greater number of residents participated in the development of their area through community development effort.

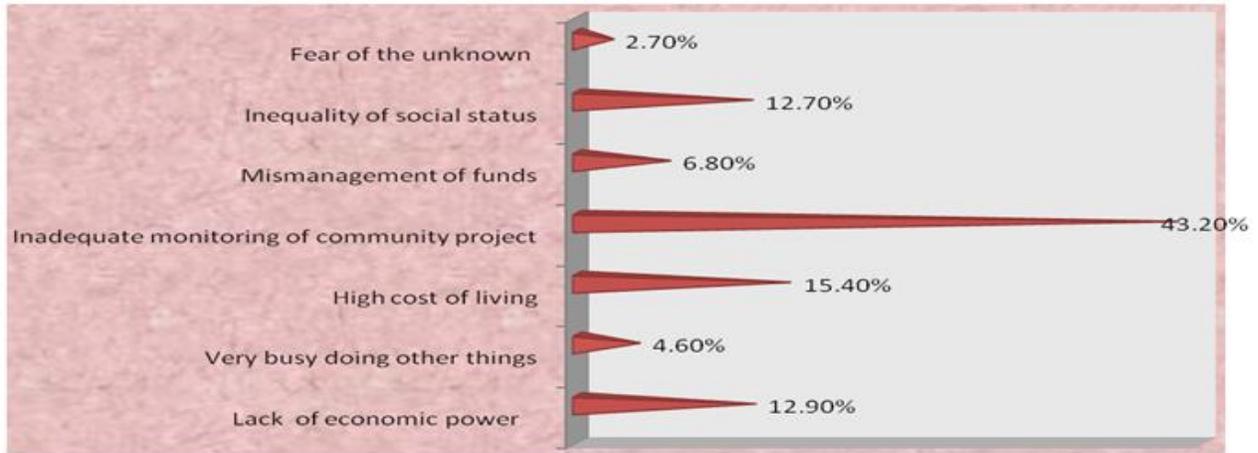


**Fig-5.** Distribution of Respondents according to Components of Participation in ONELGA

Source: Field Survey: 2015

In what ways do members of ONELGA communities participates in community development programs? Figure 4.5 shows that 24.5% of respondents participate actively in planning and decision making phase of community development project, 16.6% are active registered members, 12.3% makes active membership contributions to community projects, 10.5% were ready to make voluntary donations, 9.7% believe that regular attendance in community meetings is crucial, 7.2% enjoy giving training assistance to community members, 6.8% of respondents have actually participated in providing security services by keeping watch over ONELGA community projects to forestall abuses, vandalism etc., and 5.8% prefer to play advisory role in the community

setting dispute and pointing the way forward. Thus, it may be deduced that community members of ONELGA enjoy active participation in diverse ways to ensure success of community development programs.



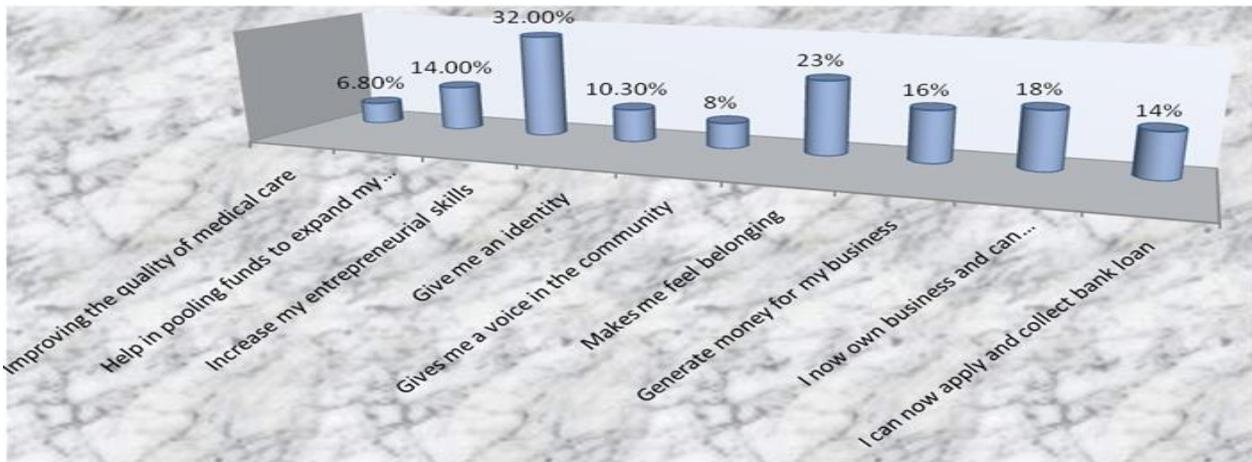
**Fig-6.** Distribution of respondents on reasons for inactive participation in ONELGA

Source: Field Survey: 2015

From figure 6 above, it can be observed that inadequate monitoring of community projects (43.2%) contributed to the major reasons for the few cases of inactive participation in community development programmes in the community under study.

### 3.4. Effect of Community Development Programmes Implementation on Alleviation of Poverty and Enhancing the Standard Living

The expectations of community people are that development programmes should have significant impact on their standard of living thereby reducing poverty level. The results on Figure 7 attempt to address this issue by showing possible areas in which respondents have agreed to have seen positive impact of community development programmes.



**Fig-7.** Opinion of Respondents on effect of Community Development Programmes on poverty alleviation.

Source: Field Survey: 2015

On figure 7, ONELGA council residents demonstrated ways in which their lives have been touched by community development programmes in the area. 32% opined that their entrepreneurial skills have been tremendously improved, 23% now has a sense of belonging, 18% were so happy that they can now own and operate businesses of their own through the support of the community programmes, 14% of respondents can now generate income to support their business and family, 14% can now apply for bank loans using their records in community development programmes as collateral, 13.8% stated that through community programmes they can use proceeds from businesses to assists their family members, 6.8% opined that by community development programmms, their health situation and medical problems are taken care of. In summary, it would not be out of place to state that effective implementation of community based programmes has impacted positively on the lives of ONELGA community people.

### 3.5. Challenges Militating Against Success of Community Development Programmes



Fig-8. Challenges Militating Against Success of Community Development Programms

Source: Field Survey: 2015

Despite the positive effect of CDP, challenges still exists which tend to impede the progress made so far. Figure 7 shows poverty level of the people (24.0%) top the list of the challenges. This was followed by lack of government funding of community programmes 20% of responses. Other factors include non-chalant attitude of members (15%), low literate level of community people 18%, incessant project abandonment 19%, and lack of interest in community affairs 11.5%.

### 3.6. Discussion of Findings

It was found that three categories of community based programs exist in ONELGA community in Rivers State namely: projects that enhance agriculture and boost food sufficiency, projects that enhance educational and knowledge capacity of ONELGA people, and programmes that ensure healthy living and increase life span of the people. In like manner, the study finds that a greater number of residents participated in the development of their area through community development effort. Similarly, members of ONELGA community enjoy active participation in diverse ways to ensure success of community development programs. Some of the areas of participation include planning and decision-making phase of community development project,

active membership registration, active membership contributions, voluntary donations, regular attendance in community meetings, giving training assistance to community members, providing security services by keeping watch over ONELGA community projects to forestall abuses, vandalism etc.

The findings are also in line with the view of [Abasiekong \(1991\)](#) who posit that the rural poor are those with annual income below certain absolute correlative level, which vary according to the special circumstance of each country; and majority of the rural poor are agricultural producers, with small holding most of who have had little or no access to government services, technical assistance or sources of credit. This kind of people cannot think of community development programmes because their condition seems quite dangerous to the extent that their subsistence level of existence is drastically affected. They cannot engage in community development programmes as a result of the harmful effects of poverty.

It was also found that, effective implementation of community based programs has impacted positively on the lives of ONELGA community people. For instance, entrepreneurial skills have been tremendously improved, gives a sense of belonging, people can now own and operate businesses of their own through the support of the community programs, people now generate income to support their businesses and families, ONELGA people now apply for bank loans using their records in community development programs as collateral, through community programs people can use proceeds from business to assists their family members, community development programs, their health situation and medical problems are taken care of. Thus, there exist significant relationship between the community development programs and poverty alleviation. The research finding also indicates that there is a significant relationship between the state of infrastructural development and accessibility of community development programmes.

#### **4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

In conclusion, it is hoped and believed that poverty and community development are significant issues in the social and economic development of ONELGA. In this study, we have seen the problems arising from non-implementation of community development programmes in the area studied. This paper has shown that for poverty reduction to take place, the appropriate strategy through effective implementation of community development programmes is one that will have a permanent solution to poverty problems. The starting point should focus on the awareness of the people to the real cause of poverty, the need to alleviate it and how to go about it, should serve as the beginning of any practical action.

The encouragement of community development programmes and self-help initiative by communities would therefore improve the condition of living of any rural communities. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made.

- i. Government should create enabling environment for more job opportunities to the youths to reduce the level of poverty in the rural communities through empowerment programmes.
- ii. Government and corporate organisations, faith based organisations and individuals should embark on more productive community development programmes to reduce level of poverty in rural communities and to help in funding and the completion of community development programmes.
- iii. There should be a means of ensuring that funds meant for developmental programmes are not embezzled but put to proper use.

- iv. Government should establish agency that will monitor the proper utilization of community development programmes; Community Development Association (CDA) should also be involved in monitoring the implementation of these programmes in the rural communities.
- v. Leaders in the community should be transparent in executing developmental programmes to encourage active participation from community residents.

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