

**Political Leadership and Community Development in Opobo/Nkoro  
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**Abstract:** This study examined the extent to which community leadership contributes towards successful community development projects in Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area, Rivers State. A total of 121 community leaders selected through the purposive sampling technique participated in the study while a total of 118 questionnaires were retrieved from the field and was used for the analysis. Frequency, percentage, Mean and standard deviation were utilized in analyzing the research questions. It was observed that leadership positions are not the exclusive preserve of a particular sex, age group, marital status or educational status; rather result indicated that the duration of residence of community leaders is a significant factor in the success of community development projects in the study area. The study concluded that knowledge on the level to which community leaders have participated in community development, and the challenges they face have serious implications for achieving sustainable community development projects. It was recommended among others that for sustainable community development to be achieved in the area, specific and deliberate strategies should be evolved to remedy some of the problems identified. The study suggests that more dedicated community leaders should be identified and responsibilities aimed at improving the welfare of the people assigned to them.

**Keywords:** Political, Leadership, Challenges, Community, Development

**INTRODUCTION**

Achieving a successful or sustainable community development in Rivers State as a whole has been on discourse for many years, but due to the challenges faced, its maximum goals are yet to be actualized. Central to the challenges of community development is the issue of leadership which is believed to pose a threat to successful community development, citizens' participation, mobilization and involvement in decision making in community development projects. Community development occurs when people strengthen the bonds within their neighbourhoods, build social networks, and form their organizations to provide a long-term capacity for problem-solving (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Community members who can 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 program both economic and individual growth must be given equal attention to ensure that the process of community development achieves its due balance, continuity and sustainability through its power structure (leadership).

Various community development literatures has been dedicated to leaders and their role in local communities (Ugboh, 2017; Zaharah & Abu, 2018; Ozor & Nwankwo, 2018). In his analysis of leaders, Fariborz et al. (2019) state that "a community without leadership may not be equipped to mobilize resources or influence tourism planning which is also an aspect of community development". He further argued that local communities, like other organizations, cannot progress successfully without active and dynamic leaders who are willing and able to take initiative. To him

also, the success of the local community initiative depends on the quality, creativity and commitment of its leadership in maintaining its daily affairs.

In line with the view of Fariborz (2019), many scholars contend that promoting local leadership to help make communities better places to live should be one of the primary purposes of community development (Mills, 2015). Several other works of literature in community leadership such as Rost (2019), Robinson (2014), and Northouse (2017) collectively suggest that community leadership emphasizes a collaborative, ongoing, influential process based on the relationships between people. But contemporary views on community leadership emphasize the need for citizens to voice their opinions and thoughts in shaping the decisions and policies that affect their lives. It may be argued that a community without leadership may not be equipped to mobilize resources or influence community development projects. Local communities according to Aref and Ma'rof (2019) cannot proceed successfully without having dynamic leaders that are willing and able to take initiatives. The lack of capable community leaders is often mentioned by local people as a barrier to community development (Aref & Ma'rof, 2018).

According to Rubin and Rubin (2011), community development is regarded as a continuous process aimed at improving the quality of life of the community. It is all about continual improvement by the people themselves to bring about change in their lives which is usually driven by its power structure. The ultimate goal of community development, therefore, is to develop members' capabilities and potential to affect their well-being and quality of life through maximizing resources utilization to benefit them socially and economically. This could only be achieved through effective management of community development programs as well as having highly committed and enthusiastic leadership. Considering the role of local leaders in the success of community development projects, it can be argued that local leaders are the baseline to every successful community development project.

A study in Imo State by Ozor and Nwakwo (2018) points out that the role of local leaders in community development programs cannot be undermined. This study involves community leaders and those individuals who were perceived as leaders of their communities, and as people who are interested and influential to the development of their communities. It, therefore, became imperative in this study to address the issue of community leadership challenges and provide best practices for achieving successful community development projects. From the foregoing, this study is directly concerned with determining the level and extent to which community leaders have contributed towards successful community development in the Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area of Bayelsa State.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Rural communities remain strategic in the socio-economic development of any nation. A lot of resources abound in the area to the extent that if they are harnessed, they will not only be a foundation but a springboard for the structural transformation for economic growth and development of the people and the nation at large. However, despite approaches adopted to tap the wealth in these rural communities, especially in the developing economies, it appears that not much has been done to harness the endowed resources of the rural areas. Ozor and Nwankwo (2018) opine that about 80% of Nigeria's population resides in the rural communities. Olatunbosun (1975 cited in Ugwuanyi & Chukwuemeka, 2013), aver that the rural communities are the major sources of capital formation for the country and a principal market for domestic manufactures. For Abah (2010), rural communities basically engage in primary economic activities (e.g. farming) that form the foundation of the country's economic development. Within the rural areas, informal economic

activities that form the bedrock of structural economic transformation of any emerging economy thrive without being accounted for neither in Gross Domestic Product nor given prominence.

However, given the importance of the rural communities in the development prospect of a developing economy, especially Nigeria, it could be observed that the communities have continued to suffer neglect. They are grossly underdeveloped and poverty has remained pervasive. While resources abound, development has eluded most communities due to lack of the mastery of the practical wisdom (leadership) and technology to mobilize them for the overall benefit of the communities” (Ozor & Nwankwo, 2018, p.63). This is to say that the lack of purposeful and knowledge leadership in some communities, the catalyst to integrate and drive the wheel of development is the bane of community development in Nigeria.

According to Iheriohanmaet *al.* (2014), most local leaders are not development oriented, have no respect for rule of law and are corrupt. These negative attributes impede on their ability to ensure an effective and sustainable community development. However, the leaders, particularly the local leaders, must begin to recognize that they have a significant role to play towards sustainable community development. A dynamic leadership enlists a dynamic community, portraying a quantum leap upwards from the status quo. This dynamism enlists advancement upwards for the social wellbeing of the people and the community at large. It is against this backdrop that the researcher intended to examine the roles and challenges of leadership and its implications on community development in Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area of Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

### Research Questions

1. What are the personal characteristics of community leaders in the study area?
2. To what extent is the level of participation of community leaders influence successful community development projects in the study area?
3. What are the challenges faced by leaders in the course of achieving a successful community development in the study area?

### Objectives of the Study

The broad aim of the study is to assess the impact of leadership on community development in the Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area of Rivers State. The specific objectives are to:

1. Determine the personal characteristics of community leaders in the study area.
2. Determine the level of participation of community leaders in successful community development projects in the study area.
3. Identify the challenges faced by community leaders in the course of achieving successful community development projects in the study area.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The aim of chapter two is to review past literature on leadership and community development. To understand the concepts properly, the concept of leadership, political leadership, community, development, community development and the role of political leadership in community development were contextually discussed. The chapter also reviewed the transformational leadership theory and the relationship with political leadership and community development. The chapter reviewed the empirical literatures on leadership and community development as well as establishing the gap in literature.

**Leadership**

Leadership has been seen from many perspectives that espouse the meaning of leadership. Hornby (2010) sees leadership from three perspectives, firstly, as the state or position of being a leader; secondly, the ability to be a leader or the qualities a good leader should have; thirdly, a group of leaders of a particular organization etc. Barikor (2015) described leadership as the person who creates the most effective change in groups' performance and as a process of influencing, directing and coordinating the activities of other people in an organization towards the advancement of the goals of the organisation. On their part, Kobani and Alozie (2015) citing Wikipedia (2014) indicated that leadership is a process of social influence in which one person can enlist the support of others in the accomplishment of a common task. So Kobani and Alozie (2015) concluded that the leader is simply somebody whom people follow or somebody who guides or directs others. Further explaining the way leadership may be viewed Kobani and Alozie indicated by reference to Anijah-Obi (2001 cited in Uzoagu, 2019) that:

1. A leader is the focus of group behavior and as such receives more communication than any other around and is the center of attention and action.
2. A leader initiates changes to accomplish the goals of an organization
3. A leader can lead a group toward group goals, motivates members towards such goals and manage available resources so that such goals can be achieved.
4. A leader is named by a group as a leader. This is based on group acceptability. It involves socio-metric affiliation of group choice and attaches themselves to the individual.
5. A leader is one who demonstrably influences group personality and measurable performance of a group.
6. A leader is the one who engages in leadership behavior and such a person specifies group goals, provides policies and programmes that can lead to group goals and is excellent in socioemotional aspects for the job of the group.

**Political Leadership**

Political leaders with their authority and power of government can distribute resources, power and authority in order to build strong and sustainable relations with their stakeholders. Political leaders are entitled to build strong framework focusing on long-term welfare of citizens. A successful political leadership can work with collaboration to charisma and integrity in order to achieve economic development and sustainability. Political leadership is totally different from politician as the term political leadership refers as position in government and working for the welfare of the state and its citizens (Hsin-yi, 2016).

A good political leader transfer powers to their followers and in the same is applicable for the corporate leader to empower their employees and get the desired results. According to Gibson, Ivancevich Donnelly and Konopaske [19], empowerment is referred as granting powers to individuals and provides them permission to utilize their talents, skills and sources effectively. This is best way to get experience and make comprehensive decisions to get work done within their time frame. He also elaborated many examples which show the work that was previously done under the domain of management having less desirable results when compare to the work given to followers with complete liberty and free consent. In same manner the role of leader is not limited with his presence with followers but co-operation with his team member is crucial factor to consider by him.

A good leader always tries to eliminate the inter-group conflicts, and always try to create the environment of co-operation and develop sense of responsibility within work groups.

### **Community Development**

The term "community" is difficult to define with precision. Despite this, it has, however, enjoyed a long existence and usage among scholars. For this study, we defined, the concept "community" as "when the members of any group, small or large, live together in such a way that they share not this or that particular interest, but the basic conditions of community life; we call that group a community". In the same vein Hearn (1969 cited in Uzoagu, 2019), defined community as "a consciously identified population with common needs and interests; it may occupy a common physical space, engage in common activities and have some form of organisation that provides for a difference in functions, making it adaptive to its environment as a means of meeting common needs.

### **Development**

The word development belongs to the group or category of words regarded by philosophers as "systematically ambiguous". According to Uzoagu (2019), a word is systematically ambiguous when it is elastic in usage or is capable of multiple meanings and when it persists in its ambiguity in whatever context and situation it is found. However, for this study, we will define development as a process to live a long and healthy life, to be knowledgeable, to have access to resources needed for a decent standard of living and to be able to participate in the life of the community (Bariko, 2015).

### **Community Development**

According to Anyanwu (1992 cited in Wimmer & Dominick, 2010), the concept of community development lacks a precise definition that caters for its ever-expanding field. Akintayo and Oghenekohwo (2004 cited in Kobani & Alozie, 2015) support this view when they observed that it is difficult to state briefly adequately and fully what is subsumed by the concept of community development. This by implication means that what constitutes community development cannot be fully described in a few meaningful words called definition. Given this, we defined community development as a movement designed to promote better living with the active participation and if possible on the initiative of the community but if this initiative is not forthcoming spontaneously, by the use of techniques for arousing and stimulating it to ensure its active and enthusiastic response to the movement.

Kobani and Alozie (2015) saw community development as a movement designed to promote better living with the active participation and if possible on the initiative of the community but if this initiative is not forth-coming spontaneously by the use of techniques for arousing and stimulating it to ensure its active and enthusiastic response to the movement. They also saw community development as a process by which the efforts of the people themselves are united with those of governmental authorities, to improve the economic, social and cultural condition of the community to integrate those communities into the life of the nation and enable then contribute fully to national progress.

Onyeozu (2017) defined community development as an educational method in which the efforts of the people, themselves are united with those of government authorities to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of the communities. According to Community Development Exchange (2013), community development is a set of values and practices which plays a special role in overcoming poverty and disadvantage, knitting society together at the grassroots and deepening democracy. It involves changing the relationships between ordinary people and

imposition of power so that everyone can take part in the issues that affect their lives. It starts from the principle that within any community there is a wealth of knowledge and experience that is used in creative ways that can be channelled into collective action to achieve the community's desired goals. Frank and Smith (2013) view community development as a process where community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems. This means that commonly development ranges from small initiatives with a small group to large initiatives that involve the broader community. Given the perspectives that development in positive change that takes place within a community in the reasons of economic, social as well as cultural and political lives of members of the community an effective leader is expected to champion development in these areas.

### **Political Leadership Role in Promotion of Sustainable Community Development in Nigeria**

An effective political leader must possess the characteristics already mentioned above. He is to guide his people and himself be guided by the understanding that community development has the principal purpose of bringing about desirable changes for the better living among the people. He must endeavour to lead his people to identify the problem inhibiting their progress as a community and should lead them to be prepared to solve them. He must endeavour to lead his people to appreciate the fact that sustainable community development can be achieved where they willingly cooperate to achieve set goals. He must therefore ensure that the citizens themselves are involved in the planning, execution and evaluation of any project designed to improve their welfare (Kobani & Alozie, 2015).

The effective community leader should lead his people to the understanding that their reliance on the resources of the community will lead to appreciation and management of any external resources coming into the community. The characteristics mentioned above indicate that a community leader must endure he accepts constructive criticism which will lead to improvement in his leadership and ensure that as the head in his relay race, he has to hand over the baton of leadership to a successor who will continue his achievement sustainably with fear of God. He can always look in retrospect satisfied that nothing will bother his conscience.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study adopted the Transformational Leadership Theory. Transformational leadership is a relatively new approach to leadership that focuses on how leaders can create valuable and positive change in their followers (Burns, 2003 cited in Effiyanti et al., 2021). James MacGregor Burns first introduced the concepts of transformational leadership when studying political leaders, but this term is now used when studying organizations and communities. Transformational leadership theory is supported by nearly 30 years of research correlating transformational leadership to positive performance outcomes including individual, group, and organizational level variables. It also solidified the need to study followers in leadership research. Transformational leadership was the first developed and validated theory to emphasize morals and values in leadership. However, research on the theory is primarily based on the multifactor leadership questionnaire, which has produced inconsistent results. Research has also focused heavily on senior-level leaders. Regardless, transformational leadership theory is a valuable and widely used approach to studying and teaching leadership.

Burns described two leadership styles: transactional and transformational. Transactional leaders focus on gaining compliance by giving and withholding rewards and benefits. Transformational leaders focus on "transforming" others to support each other and the organization as a whole. Followers of a transformational leader respond by feeling trust, admiration, loyalty, and respect for the leader and are more willing to work harder than originally expected. Another researcher,

Bernard M. Bass, added to the work of Burns by explaining the psychological mechanisms that underlie transformational and transactional leadership (Effiyanti et al., 2021). Bass' work established that transformational leaders demonstrate four factors: individual consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation (charismatic leadership), and idealized influence.

This theory implies that the more the political leaders adopt the transformational approach, the more they tend to build a strong team with members of the communities. This is because transformational leadership is centered on the assumption that leaders can change followers' beliefs, assumptions, and behavior by appealing to the importance of collective or organizational outcomes (Soss et al., 2011).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The design was adopted in order to gain different perspectives and draw attention to different factors that affect the leadership and community development. The researcher deemed this design appropriate for the study because it establishes the link between leadership and community development. The population comprised all the political leaders in the selected areas without restriction to any other socio-economic characteristic. The study was carried out in Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area of Rivers State Nigeria. Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area is made up of 14 major communities and 11 political wards. The sample size for the study is 121 political leaders. A purposive/judgmental sampling technique was used in selecting the category of respondents in the ward. To select the actual political leaders in the wards, a pretest was conducted. In the pretest, the councillors representing the wards were asked to identify 10 leaders in their respective wards. From the list that was ranked, 11 leaders were finally selected from each ward giving a total of 121 political leaders from the eleven (11) political wards. However, valid responses that are suitable for analysis were obtained from only 118 political leaders. A set well-structured and validated questionnaire instrument with items based on the objectives of the study was used for primary data collection. Key Informant Interview (KII) was conducted in each political ward to make the study more interactive and participatory oriented. Items discussed were centered on the specific objectives of the study. Trained research assistant assisted in the collection of data under the supervision of the researchers.

The instrument was pretested for reliability using the split-halve correlation technique and validated by experts in leadership and community development (the academia and rural development experts). The pre-test shows a reliability coefficient of 0.82 and was significant at the 0.00 probability level. According to Bryman (2014), a reliability coefficient of 0.8 and above implies a satisfactory and acceptable level of internal reliability.

Tables, Percentages, mean and standard deviation was used to analyze the socio-demographic data and the research questions while qualitative data were transcribed and sorted, and the content properly analyzed.

## **Data Presentation**

### **Analysis of Research Questions**

**Research Question 1:** What are the personal characteristics of political leaders in the study area?

**Table 1 Respondents Demographics**

1	<b>Respondents' Gender</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Per cent</b>
	Male	83	70.3
	Female	35	29.6
	Total	118	100.0
2	<b>Respondents' Age</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Per cent</b>
	20-35 years	17	14.4
	36-45 years	53	44.9
	46-55 years	33	27.9
	55 years plus	15	12.7
	Total	118	100.0
3	<b>Respondents' Religion</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Per cent</b>
	Christianity	102	86.4
	Islam	2	1.6
	Traditional Worshippers	15	12.7
	Others	1	0.84
	Total	118	100.0
4	<b>Marital Status of Respondents</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Per cent</b>
	Single	91	77.1
	Married	18	15.2
	Divorced/Separated	4	3.3
	Widowed	5	4.2
	Total	118	100.0
5	<b>Educational Level</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Per cent</b>
	No formal education	3	2.5
	Primary education	29	24.5
	Secondary education	21	17.7
	Tertiary education	65	55
	Total	118	100.0
6	<b>Year of Residence</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Per cent</b>
	Less than 10 years	6	5
	11-20 years	13	11
	21-30 years	32	27.1
	31-40 years	23	19.4
	41 years and above	44	37.2
	Total	118	100.0

**Source: Field Survey (2022)**

Table 1 shows details of the personal characteristics of community leaders. Out of the 118 political leaders, the survey indicated that approximately 70.3% and 29.6% of the respondents were male and female respectively. About 14.4% were 20 – 35 years; 44.9% were 36 – 45 years; 27.9% were 46 – 55 years while 12.7% were above 55 years of age. The respondents were predominately Christians (86.4%), traditional worshippers (12.7%) and only about 1.6% was Muslims while another 0.84% was other religions. Data from the same table further revealed that a little above half of the respondents (77.1%) were married, below one-quarter (15.2%) were single, while less than one-quarter (3.3%) were divorced and separated, while (4.2%) were widowed. Also, 2.5% did not acquire any formal education while little below one-quarter 24.5% had primary education, 17.7%



acquired secondary formal education, while majority of the respondents above 50% (i.e. 55%) had tertiary education.

Furthermore, data in the same table show that 5% of the respondents have resided in the community for less than 10 years, 11% had lived in the community for 11-20 years, 27.1% had lived for 21-30 years, and 19.4% had lived in the sampled communities for 31-40 years while 37.2% had lived in the communities for 41 years and above. Findings from Table 1 show that leadership positions are not the exclusive preserve of a particular sex, age group or educational status. However, respondents noted that in a few cases, the educational level could enhance the quality of decision-making and facilitate the understanding of crucial decision-making issues. The length or duration of residence also had a significant relationship with the category of persons considered for a leadership position, and the success of any community development project.

**Research Question 2: To what extent is the level of participation of community leaders influence successful community development projects in the study area?**

**Table 2 The Role of Political Leaders in Community Development (N=118, Criterion Mean=2.50)**

S/N	Items	Mean	STD.	Decision
7	Making decisions on different issues affecting the community that require an integrated approach	2.99	0.83	Accepted
8	Community mobilization	2.82	0.84	Accepted
9	Raising funds through levies, donations, launchings, etc. to finance community development projects in the area	3.16	0.75	Accepted
10	Ensuring cordial relationships among the ruralites for effective and efficient participation in community development programmes	2.08	1.00	Not Accepted
11	Developing a plan of work for the community projects	3.24	0.71	Accepted
12	Monitoring and evaluation of projects for proper implementation	3.27	0.68	Accepted
13	Organizing skilled and unskilled labor for the project	1.69	0.70	Not Accepted
14	Maintenance of peace and harmony between communities that bound own community	2.86	0.84	Accepted
15	Settling of household disputes	2.87	0.73	Accepted
<b>Grand Mean</b>		<b>2.77</b>	<b>0.78</b>	<b>Accepted</b>

**Source: Field Survey (2022).**

The levels of community leaders' participation were obtained through careful computation, as is shown in Table 2 above. The various aspects of participation identified include: Making decisions on different issues affecting the community that require an integrated approach, community mobilization, raising funds through levies, donations, launchings, etc. to finance community development projects in the area, project legitimization, planning the project, ensuring cordial relationship among the ruralites for effective and efficient participation in community development programs, developing a plan of work for the community projects, monitoring, evaluating the project and organizing skilled and unskilled labor for the project, maintenance of peace and harmony between communities that bound own community and settling household disputes.

Results in Table 2 show that the level of participation by community leaders in a community development project in the study area was significantly high in monitoring and evaluation of

projects for proper implementation which ranks first (mean =3.27), followed closely by developing a plan of work for the community projects (mean =3.24). Raising funds through levies, donations, launchings, etc. to finance community development projects in the area was ranked third with (mean = 3.16); making decisions on different issues affecting the community that require integrated approach ranked fourth (2.99), settling of household disputes ranked fifth (2.87), maintenance of peace and harmony between communities that bound own community (2.86), while community mobilization was ranked seventh with a mean ratio of (2.82). However, the results show ensuring cordial relationship among the ruralites for effective and efficient participation in community development programs (2.08) and low level of participation by community leaders in organizing skilled and unskilled labor for the project that was ranked ninth (1.69) were ranked low. From the foregoing analysis, it can be deduced that there is a high level of participation (Grand mean = 2.77) by community leaders in various community development projects in the study area, and this has led to the success of the various project in the communities.

**Research Question 3: What are the challenges faced by leaders in the course of achieving successful community development in the study area?**

**Table 3 The Challenges Faced by Political Leaders in Community Development (N=118, Criterion Mean=2.50)**

S/N	Items	Mean	STD.	Decision
16	Lack of funding	3.31	0.66	Accepted
17	Lack of interest in community development project by the political leader	1.84	0.90	Accepted
18	Disagreement between political leaders and community members	3.25	0.69	Accepted
19	Non-inclusion of the community members in the planning and execution of the project by community leaders	3.24	0.72	Accepted
20	Women discrimination in a political leadership position	2.54	1.12	Accepted
21	Low level of education of political leaders	2.24	1.11	Not Accepted
23	Community tradition or culture	1.96	0.91	Not Accepted
<b>Grand Mean</b>		<b>2.62</b>	<b>0.87</b>	Accepted

**Source: Field Survey (2022).**

Data on factors that hinder community leaders from achieving results are presented in Table 3 and it outlays some of the crucial challenges identified as hindering community leaders from achieving results in the course of a community development project. The result shows that out of the seven (7) challenges considered, respondents perceived 4 as a major challenge and 3 as not a challenge. The most important of the challenges perceived by respondents include, lack of funds which ranked first (3.31), disagreement between community leaders and community members was ranked second (3.25), non-inclusion of the community members in the planning and execution of the project by community leaders was ranked third (3.24), and women discrimination in a leadership position (2.54). Conversely, the result shows that low level of education of community leaders was not a challenge to community leaders in the course of achieving a successful community development project as it was ranked sixth (2.24), community tradition or culture was also indicated as not posing any challenge to achieving a successful community development project in the study area (1.96) and lastly lack of interest in community development project by the leader was not considered a challenge (1.84).

**Discussion of Findings**

Findings from this study bring to focus that characteristics of political leaders can contribute or influence the success of community development projects or programs. Relating to the findings of this study, Fisher (2015) stated that the characteristics of leaders have a significant impact on community development, while Schultz (2014) states the importance of leaders' characteristics in the community development effort. One of the key characteristics as identified by one of our respondents is the period at which a leader or individual resides in the area. This finding is supported by the studies conducted by Aref and Ma'rof (2018) and Lawton (2015). Who states that permanent residents may be more supportive of community development than seasonal residents? Lawton (2005) also added that the duration of residence in the community plays an important role in supporting community development. One of the participant interviewed noted that:

The more time the individual spend in the communities, the more he would be able to contribute to the development of the community. If you give political positions to those that stays abroad or somewhere else, the person would neglect the community. This means it is crucial for community leaders to be people who have stayed in the community for many years (Interview with Mr. DatuwuJaja).

According to Kirk and Kraft (2014), the actual participation of political leaders in the execution of community development projects could be a strong indicator of the progress of the project. The success of most community development projects depends on community participation that is enabled by the leaders participating in the project. In line with the findings in Table 3, it can be deduced that the level of participation of community leaders is a strong indicator for the success of community development projects.

Similarly, the findings of this study also show that lack of funds was a major challenge faced by community leaders in the course of achieving a successful community development project. Similarly, it has been observed by Ugboh (2017) that insufficient funds have prevented many good ideas that were developed in communities. To a large extent, as found from this study, if political leaders could not access funds it may lead to abandoned projects even as respondents noted in a study by Ozor and Nwankwo (2008), that there were many abandoned projects in the community as a result of lack of funds to complete them. To support this, the councillor representing Ward 1 in Opobo Town argued thus:

We have many good ideas to move our community. Even me, I have planned so many things for my ward people but the fund remains a major challenge. Sometimes I lack words to say to my people because they expected projects and empowerment and not mere words.

It is quite clear from the findings of this study that discrimination against women from holding leadership positions will hinder community projects. The findings of Ozor and Nwankwo (2018) confirm strongly that gender bias in political leadership adversely inhibits success in community development projects. In Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area, the women suffer the challenge of neglect from the men and even the women. Mrs. Gloria Peterside, one of the political leaders in Opobo Town noted that it is not easy for women leaders in the communities. The women go through untold challenges in being leaders and that is not good for the women.

But the outcome of studies by, Farinde et al. (2014); Ajayi and Otuya (2016) and Okoji (2014) indicates that women possess the necessary skills and capacity to deliver good programs in the community, and effectively accomplish community development projects. In their studies, Zaharah and Abu (2008) observed that women, leadership relates more to a holistic and bottom-ups' approach in developing the community. This approach has greater success and impact on

community development compared to the top-down approach commonly utilized by male community leaders. In conclusion, both men and women should be involved in leadership roles in community development so that they can complement each other's efforts where necessary (Ozor & Nwankwo, 2018).

Furthermore, this study shows the importance of including community members in the planning and execution of community development projects. In a similar study by Ogolo (1995), Asnarulkhadi and Fariborz (2019), Chili and Ngxongo (2017) and Ekong (2010), people participate in developmental projects if they share in the identification of the development priorities, planning and implementation. However, the result of this study did not show the low level of education, traditions and culture pose hindrances to community leaders' efforts toward achieving results in community development projects. This was justified as respondents interviewed noted that the level of education has no relationship to successful community development projects.

### **Conclusion**

Community development has been identified as an important effort aimed at improving the lot of local people. In Nigeria, various governments (both military and civilian) have done a lot in ensuring sustainable community and rural development. Despite these efforts, development has continued to elude majority of rural areas. These communities have suffered neglect, they are poverty stricken and they lack the basic rural infrastructure such as good water supply, road and electricity. There is no accessibility to credit and banking facilities. These problems are believed to be compounded by leadership challenges. Most local political leaders are not development oriented, have no respect for rule of law and are corrupt. These negative attributes impede on their ability to ensure an effective and sustainable community development. However, our leaders, particularly the local political leaders, should begin to recognize that they have a significant role to play towards sustainable community development. A dynamic leadership enlists a dynamic community, portraying a quantum leap upwards from the status quo. This dynamism enlists advancement upwards for the social wellbeing of the people and the community at large.

### **Recommendations**

This study, therefore, recommends that:

1. For sustainable community development to be achieved in the area, specific and deliberate strategies should be evolved to remedy some of the problems identified that limit the role of political leaders at the grassroots level.
2. The study suggests that more dedicated political leaders should be identified and given responsibilities aimed at improving the welfare of the people assigned to them.
3. Also, every member of the community should be made to contribute his or her quota towards community development projects; such contributions will enhance sustainability in terms of security, acceptability, usage and identification of the people with the said projects.
4. Women should be given a favorable environment to contribute to community development by way of engaging them in political leadership positions. This will go a long way to give the women sense of belonging.

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