



# Participatory and holistic approaches to sustainable development: A conceptual exposition

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## Abstract

This paper discussed participatory and holistic approaches to sustainable development and additionally used studies to further elucidate the benefits of these approaches. Stakeholders' participation in community development planning and implementation must be broad-based. This is more so for developing nations where development and cultural challenges are more. The paper made the following conclusions: that participation of beneficiaries in the formulation of sustainable development intervention is critical to ensuring a robust outcome and that community representatives should be part of each LGA development planning team and LGA focal points should be part of each state development planning and equally, state focal points should be members of the national planning team. The paper also advanced the position that development planning efforts must be integrated holistically and multifaceted, considering (as much as possible) most of the factors within which the developmental challenge is situated. This paper then advanced a new industry-related development planning concept using related theoretical concepts and finally used four case studies on youth development, women empowerment, competitive bursary payment, and participatory roads/drainages construction implemented by multi-sectoral stakeholders led by community-based organizations under the Global Memorandum of Understanding (GMOU) in Bayelsa state, Nigeria as successful examples of participatory and holistic sustainable community developmental approaches.

**Keywords:** Sustainable Development; Sustainable Community Development; Beneficiary Participation; Holistic Approach; Global Memorandum of Understanding

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## 1. Introduction

Developing nations have a number of challenges that hinder their rapid development. Some include poor funding of developmental interventions, unrealistically high numbers of out-of-school children, unmanageable high populations, resulting in high unemployment rates, pervasive poverty, ignorance/illiteracy, and corruption among many others. Concentrating on only infrastructure development therefore cannot result in rapid and sustainable development of the people, rather, a holistic and coordinated approach involving the beneficiaries towards addressing the identified challenges is better. Such an approach equally addresses the capacity development needs of the beneficiaries (Lawrence, 2018; Lawrence et al., 2020 and World Population Review, 2022). The four case studies utilized in this paper, are to show that interventions can aptly address these challenges, if community development planning is intentionally participatory and holistic in a way that funds are allocated to critical areas of needs, in percentages so that no critical areas are neglected and the synergy derivable from holistic coordination is gained.

Beneficiary participation is increasingly required for long-term growth. Oltheten (1994) defined both passive and process/interactive participatory approaches, and sustainable development obviously should be as interactive as possible, with beneficiary participation leading to outcomes that are the results of activities undertaken and driven primarily by the beneficiaries and guided by the professional support teams. Participation presupposes the following: the process empowers the beneficiaries, the beneficiaries participate and contribute to the planning process because they have a better understanding of their environment and how the intervention will impact them, the process results in two-way learning between the beneficiaries and project sponsors/expert support teams and there is greater commitment and support from the beneficiaries towards the project implementation and ultimate ownership and as a result, there is a better understanding of the benefits derivable from the project.

A holistic approach, on the other hand, guarantees that needs assessment and intervention planning should look at the problem and the community/beneficiaries from a holistic viewpoint, considering all of the factors that surround the developmental challenge or the need for developmental improvement. Torneire (2021) quoted (Skrable, 2016) and defined holistically as a creative and collaborative process aimed at cultivating the economic, cultural, social, environmental, and political circumstances necessary for the entire community to prosper.

Sustainable Community Development (SCD) is a subset of Sustainable Development (SD). This paper however will address development concerns that affect not only single projects, but a set of interventions intended at developing clusters of communities, a whole state, and sometimes an industry within a nation especially in developing nations. The case studies used in this paper demonstrate the types of experiences the authors have gained while conducting research and managing stakeholders and also working with clusters of communities within Global Memorandum of Understanding (GMOU) platforms, as practiced by Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria (SPDC), a Multinational Oil and Gas company and her Joint Venture partners, that sponsor Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) investments within their host communities in the Niger Delta of Nigeria, prior to the new Petroleum Industry Act (PIA) that the Nigeria government has enacted. The new act stipulated Host Community Development Trust as the new community developmental interface platform for oil-producing companies and their host communities. (Jegade and Idiaru, 2021). GMOUs are generally mediated by the host state government and facilitated by a Non-Governmental

Organization (NGO). Each development cluster is made up of community-based organizations known as Community Trusts (CTs), and the Cluster Development Board (CDB) is made up of chairmen, secretaries, and treasurers of these CTs. The GMOU is a special-purpose vehicle that specifies the company's commitments to sponsoring community development initiatives inside each cluster of communities, which are viewed as its hosts or neighbours, and the communities in addition, affirm their own pledges to good neighbourliness and peaceful cohabitations in the GMOU. Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) are engaged again after the GMOU negotiations to manage the implementation of the agreements. This is to ensure that the approved developmental processes, policies, guidelines, and best practices are implemented smoothly with quality/process adherence. All stakeholders are therefore involved in the planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of interventions.

This paper elucidates concepts like beneficiary participation, holistic methods, and industry-related planning as ways of amplifying the benefits of sustainability of appropriate interventions. This paper will therefore provide justifications for why participatory methods and holistic approaches are critical for enhanced sustainable development, and this paper expounds principles that apply to most planning operations including those needed for business and marketing (though the case studies used are heavily tilted towards sustainable community development).

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1. Strategic planning**

Betz (2022) reported that strategic planning is suitable for all including companies, other groups, and even for individuals. It is the ability to think through ways to achieve desired outcomes. Strategic planning helps all realize their goals for the future and achieve the goals in a unified direction. Betz (2022) explained that working backward from the desired outcome, effective strategic planning consists of coming up with the steps we need to take today in order to get where we want to be tomorrow, that is envisioning desired future outcomes and collectively agreeing on how to turn them into reality.

Strategic planning is an organized endeavour to carry out the key strategies of the organization and their application to achieve the organization's goals. Strategic planning determines the organizational goals in terms of the organization's purpose and identifies the opportunities and threats, weaknesses and strengths through environmental studies so that it can achieve more realistic goals, the use of strategic planning by managers and other leaders can produce positive points for the group in the long term. Strategic planning assists organizations in preparing for new situations, adapting behaviour, and developing appropriate responses to incoming events (Harrison and Karren, 2000). The initial phase in the strategic planning process is to analyze the organizational situation. The fundamental concern in attempting to create an optimal model for strategic planning is, which are the effective circumstances and factors on the organization and what consequences they have on the organization. Firstly, we must identify these factors, whether internal or external. The determination and execution of plans and actions is the second component of strategic planning. This component explains how the organization's plans and actions will be carried out (Maccoby, 2011). The third step in strategic planning is to forecast the organization's future problems and performance. When we foresee the scenario in the organization, we can actually predict its future performance. The final component of the

strategic planning process is the use of ways to achieve goals, which is seen as the final step of the strategic planning process that produces the essential information/intelligence for the organization to become innovative. The foregoing so far, has been essentially ideas that are general and often applied to corporate organizations. However, communities and their components can apply the same principles in terms of pursuing the sustainable development goals. The same can be applied at the larger scopes involving local government area, state, and national levels. In order to achieve a success in planning, one must have reliable information or a strategic intelligence support system. According to (Helfat and Peteraf, 2015), strategic intelligence is the ability to gaze outwardly, focusing on understanding and anticipating others, especially competitors. Lawrence and Poi (2021) discovered that strategic moves, actions, and reactions of firms are significantly determined by their capability to vary their strategic intelligence. Hence, an organisation must be able to identify sensitive data needed for sustainability and place indicators to this effect.

## 2.2. Participatory and holistic approaches to planning

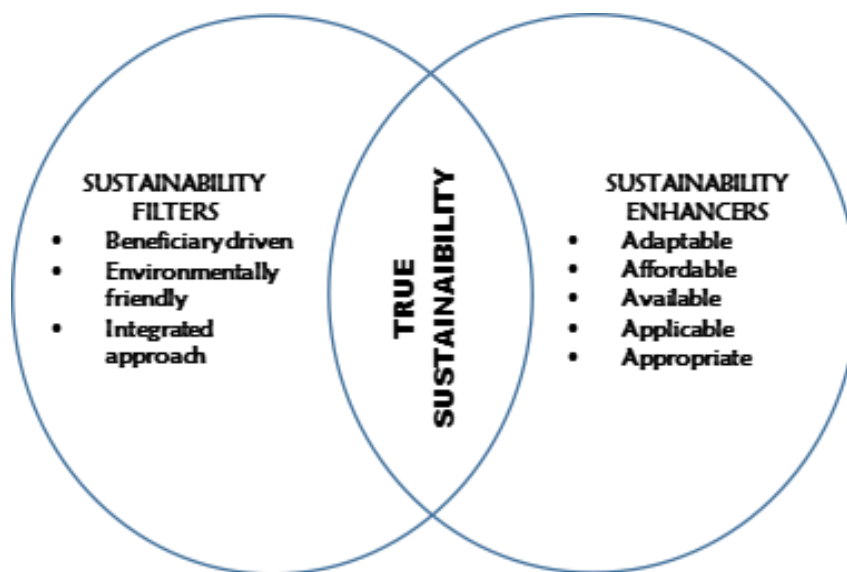
The work of Lawrence (2017) was reported by (Lawrence and Lawrence, 2019) who developed a two-factor concept he called the 'true sustainability concept'. He stated that it is important to subject every new community development intervention to this two-staged macro-level selection process, which is sustainability filters and sustainability enhancers. The position taken in that paper is that the Sustainability criterion can be used to test the suitability of new projects and new technology, and the criterion enhances project or intervention success after implementation.

Sustainability Filters address the issues of beneficiary participation from planning to project completion, the impacts of the project on the health, environment, and safety of the stakeholders, and finally the need to ensure that the planning has addressed the concerns of all internal and other external factors that can impact the project and the society where the project is located.

The other leg of the criterion is about the Sustainability Enhancers. Lawrence (2017) describes Sustainability Enhancers as those factors when present make interventions more sustainable (using the 5 A's of Adaptable, Affordable, Available, Applicable, and Appropriate).

- I. Adaptable: Intervention should be easily modifiable and usable in other circumstances. Interventions that are easily replicable will be more easily mass-adopted.
- II. Available: Interventions that are more easily available with spare parts for maintenance purposes where necessary have an advantage.
- III. Affordable: Intervention should be cheap enough to attract more investors and ensure mass production, replication, and adoption.
- IV. Applicable: Interventions that can effectively resolve the challenge will be better than those that after resolving the problem cause new ones or only partially address the problem.
- V. Appropriate: the intervention should be relevant to the level of development of the beneficiaries. You do not give electricity-powered computers to people in rural areas where electric power is not reliable. All interventions must be looked at holistically in addressing all the factors needed to make them successful and functional.

Based on the above, true sustainability is achieved where sustainability filters overlap with the sustainability enhancers as shown in Figure 1:



**Figure 1.** Shows the section on true sustainability where sustainable filter criteria overlap with the criteria of sustainable enhancers (Source: Lawrence, 2017)

Sustainable development project planning, no matter the type of project, requires a deliberate effort to integrate all the aspects, use a holistic approach to solving problems requiring interventions and adequately involve the beneficiaries in the planning and implementation of the intervention.

Every intervention that ensures the participation and involvement of target beneficiaries in the planning of the appropriate intervention will likely succeed because the concerns of the users have been addressed, also those factors that may impede users' dislike of the intervention would have been addressed regarding how amenable the intervention is to changes, replication, maintenance, affordability, etc.

### 2.3. Planning and implementing the agricultural industrial programme as an example of industry-related planning

Industry-related planning is a new concept, but the activities are not new, and many people often plan major projects to cover a number of communities. Though such projects are single individual projects, they might have been planned sometimes, partially in line with the concept of industry-related projects. The difference is that the industry-related approach we are advocating, involves implementing long-term major projects/programmes from a holistic perspective, integrating all the aspects of planning, researching, producing, and marketing on a continuous basis, even during the operational phase towards achieving continual improvement.

Lawrence (2022) published a related paper to this concept using a rotational system involving tree crops and annual crops. This concept is a potential area that can usher rapid developmental transformation and it requires urgent attention in developing nations like Nigeria. For agriculture, this concept is important because of land pressure as a result of over-population and poverty, and it involves the identification of suitable crops that can be used in the rotation system as proposed by (Lawrence, 2022). Some potential economic tree crops, such as cocoa, rubber, cashew, and mango, can be evaluated to determine their appropriateness as good options from both the agronomic and economic standpoints for use in the Nigerian tropics.

These crops can be grown as mono-crops indefinitely because tree crops have a natural fertility regeneration system with the usual litter drops, but the planned system, whereby the trees are cut down after a few years to make place for arable crop cultivation along with appropriate inorganic fertilization regimes will enhance productivity tremendously. During the arable crop cultivation phase, the chopping down of these crops will generate a large amount of litter and mulching materials, mimicking and enhancing the natural system more effectively. However, research into the best methods of mulching and fertilizer application is still needed. Coppicing methods and frequency must be investigated, as well as the various agronomic/economic returns from different tree crop/arable crop rotation systems and periods.

Lawrence (2022) explained this notion very effectively in his work on the Sustainable Agroforestry system for crop rotation system. He discussed the studies of tree crop production utilizing Cocoa as a test case, associated post-harvest industries/value addition options, and product marketing prospects. However, other options for whose products can be a ready source for industrial raw materials include pineapple, tomatoes, etc. These concepts if well implemented can improve economic returns and increase economic activities including opportunities for stakeholders to establish and produce value-adding industries, which will improve employment opportunities among others, and such an attractive system will sell itself easily for adoption by many stakeholders (communities, companies, and governments).

This intervention if properly implemented, has the potential therefore to: reduce the proportion of people in abject poverty (SDG1), reduce the number of people that are suffering acute hunger (SDG2), promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all (SDG8) and build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation (SDG9), (United Nations Report, 2022). Also, Corporate Sustainability Assessment (CSA) in manufacturing is a framing of tools that guide the organization toward sustainable practices and indicate how the same organization contributes to a global Sustainable Development (SD) (Moldavska and Welo,2019).

#### 2.4. Multi-sectoral partnership in community development

Interventions in the community for whatever reason should involve the beneficiaries. Such interventions may be to assess their development needs, and this can be by using elaborate research methods or other participatory appraisal methods including community development planning through setting achievable and shared vision, goals, objectives and setting targets, agreeing on how to source for additional required funds to realise set objectives and agreeing on implementation strategies. Other community development related activities include sensitization, enlightenment campaigns, formal and informal training events to bridge knowledge and community capacity gaps, project implementation, and project management after implementation and also removing mental barriers that can cause community apathy and disinterest Maiolini

et al. (2022) and Dentoni et al. (2016). The use of multisectoral approach to solving community problems has taken root in developing nations. A lot more can be achieved through global networks which will combine the community members' local knowledge of the problems and their environment, the technical expertise residing in the higher educational institutions and other consulting agents and funding from local, national, and international donors. This is the role global networks like the Global Regional Expertise (RCE) on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) can play.

## 2.5. Literature review summary

The literature review started in section 2.1 with some literature on strategic planning, then in section 2.2, we introduced the fundamental issues of true sustainability through the use of participatory and holistic approaches. We showed graphically how the concepts of sustainability filters and sustainability enhancers can converge to effect true sustainability. The sustainability filters discussed core aspects that must be present for an intervention to be sustainable and holistic. Sustainability filters encapsulate the need for beneficiaries to drive interventions, and that such interventions must be environmentally friendly. It equally takes into consideration the fact that such intervention mixes should be holistically integrated as components in a programmatic manner, instead of implementing individual projects as stand-alone. The other aspect of sustainability enhancers explained the five criteria (As) that when considered enhance intervention sustainability. In section 2.3, we introduce the new concept of industry-related planning using the work of (Lawrence, 2022) to drive it home. Finally, in section 2.4, we justified the need for multi-sectoral partnership, if we must ensure a high level of participation and coordinated intervention implementation.

## 3. Types of development planning

### 3.1. Stand-alone project planning

Many interventionist groups and governments are unwilling to wait for the extensive participatory and holistic planning required prior to intervention identification and implementation. Often, developmental interventionists and even beneficiaries attempt to address the fundamental problems they face without considering the context and underlying factors in which that problem exists. These result in solutions/interventions that are not very effective. The Government can choose to solve a major challenge, such as a lack of clean water in a community or the need to build a road immediately without conducting any impact studies or understanding how that intervention can affect current ecosystem balance or livelihoods in the vicinities.

Another interventionist may choose to build a school, a market, a specialized institute for football, a transportation system, high-end medical center for specialized health problems without fully and professionally understanding the manpower and other requirements needed and who is to carry them out with guaranteed budget provisions. Invariably, the resolution of the problem produces new ones, or the project becomes a white elephant that is undesirable because the planning was defective, and all variables were not considered. Human or societal problems occur in complex environments, it is critical therefore that even if a specific intervention for immediate implementation is needed, a comprehensive review of the situation in

which the problem exists will aid in providing a greater understanding of how best to intervene. A major issue is that elected officials want to quickly get some quick-win projects implemented so that they can endear themselves to the electorate for re-election and this pressure to deliver campaign promises often counters the need for good planning.

### 3.2. Integrated community development planning

Aside from the stand-alone project planning, it is more acceptable that an interventionist first of all carry out a community development planning to look at a location and understand the livelihood issues, the community challenges, and needs, that is: the current and future developmental needs and other amenities required in the area to develop an integrated and holistic time-bound (4 to 5 years) community development plan. This exercise carried out prior to deciding interventions helps the beneficiaries and the sponsor to objectively challenge the options. The outcome of such an effort that is properly carried out will generally kick start the costing of identified interventions, as well as starting the initial stages of development implementation, stakeholders' engagements/education, and deployment of available resources towards the implementation of what is agreed in the community development plan. Usually, the planners of intervention identification should also consider, more than one scope (scenario planning), so that the stakeholders have options and choices at their disposal when taking decisions (on how to proceed and which intervention to start with in their priority mixes), based on budget availability and stakeholders' consensus priorities. The decisions or choices may also include focusing more resources on one intervention or narrowing the scope to accommodate several interventions and thus spreading out the resources to touch more than one intervention at the same time, so as to have a cocktail of interventions implemented together. Several factors can influence such choices including pressure from the various stakeholders, the need for synergistic benefits, and probably implementation constraints by technology availability, environmental issues, fund release issues, political correctness, and so on.

While community development planning is appropriate for most rural and urban areas at the community level and can be aggregated for as many communities as possible, intervention mixes that include human capital/human development components in the composite and co-ordinated programmes are a must for such project mixes to be more sustainable. In view of the high deficit of infrastructure and other amenities, especially in rural areas, communities have to use part of the funding available to them to implement critical infrastructural facilities/amenities. The reason is that while infrastructure projects require continuous maintenance inputs for sustainability, it is the human components that can ensure continuous functionality and sustainability of any development plan.

Intervening bodies must incorporate into infrastructure projects avenues for the project owners to generate-income to maintain such projects on completion. This can be by also providing in addition to the infrastructure project, the establishment of other income-generating projects to raise revenue or to adequately empower the people so that over time the beneficiaries will be empowered enough financially to maintain their community projects and even embark on new self-help projects without waiting for government and external bodies. The government also gains because the citizens are better able to pay more taxes which in turn will enrich the coffers of the government to better develop the people.



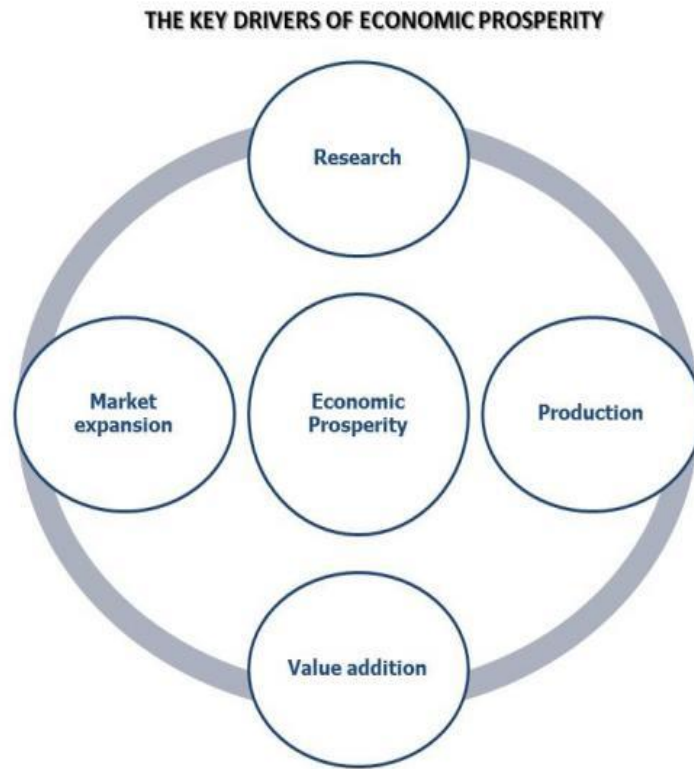
### 3.3. Master planning

A multidisciplinary implemented Master Plan and subsequent updates are required to supplement community development planning, as it looks at the overview and it is using a lot more multi-disciplinary experts from the word go than is required at the community development planning levels. A well-crafted master plan will effectively find the best solutions to both municipal and community development issues by improving the quality of life for all residents of the location and considering the existing conditions, problems, and development resources. A Master plan of this type should have a legal basis to guide the development of the area.

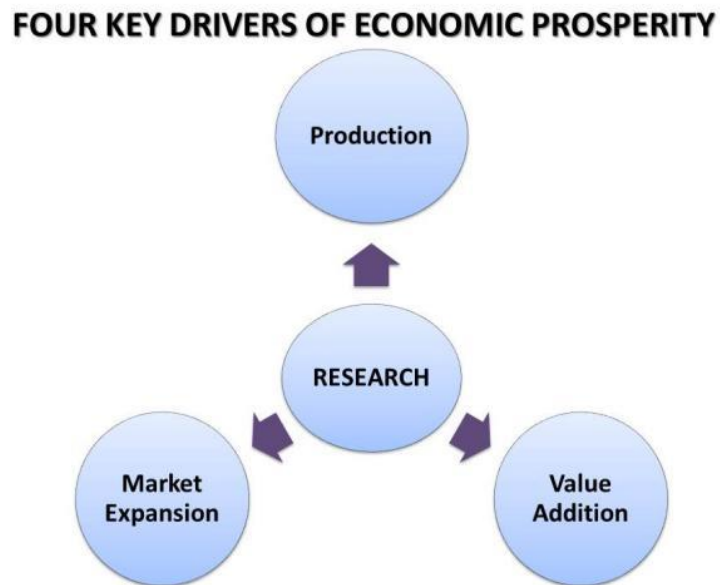
Master planning necessitates the participation of all relevant stakeholders: the federal, state, and local governments, their agencies, private investors, partners, national and international development agencies, and intentions for community self-help projects, to understand their future aspirations for the area and taking such into cognizance in the planning process.

### 3.4. Industry-related planning

Industry-related planning is a new concept that advances the need for large-scale planning of a specific industry from a participatory and holistic manner considering all the aspects of an industry (research, production, value addition, and marketing). Industry-related planning is an effective development tool for any capable organization including large-scale companies, local, state, and national governments and their agencies. Any serious government that wants to prosper its people as a necessity should always include industry-related perspective planning for key aspects of the economy. It is true that in a free market economy, a good leader must have a team that is driving the research focus areas for continual improvement to ensure an advantageous edge over other competitors in large production to enjoy economy of scale, improvement of quality, efficiency in production, reduction in unit cost, longer shelf-life, etc. In agriculture, for example, it is important to identify crops that the place has a comparative advantage in producing, that is having greater suitability in terms of the soil and other environmental requirements, etc. In the rainforest regions of Nigeria with its highly leached and acidic soils, tree crops are very suitable because their fertility requirement is minimal since their litter drops help in enhancing fertility and there is adequate availability of land in several places. What is required therefore is to identify a few tree crops that have great commercial potential and are very adapted to the place. Then the government can help in the provision of the enabling environment that can kick-start the adoption and production. An industry-related plan can be for the Cocoa industry (research, production, value addition, and marketing) for example. It can also be utilized for other economic areas like oil palm and cashew production, processing and marketing, production on larger-scale or clustering of many small-scale farmers, processing and marketing of fish products, along with the associated agro-allied businesses after the breeding of fast-growing and adapted fish types for the brackish water conditions to utilize some of the vast swamp lands in the Delta, hydro-carbon mining, establishment, and operations of a number of modular refineries clustered together near a large oil reserve to eliminate the need for long crude oil feedstock pipeline that is exposed to pilfering and losses, beef and milk production, electricity generation/distribution, and so on and the purpose of such a plan may be to continually improve a brownfield or to start a greenfield production. However, a well-executed industry-related plan will be multi-faceted, holistic, integrated, and forward-looking. Figures 2 and 3 help to clarify this concept.



**Figure 2.** Four key drivers of sustainable development and their integrated nature



**Figure 3.** Research is central to economic prosperity (Source: conceptualized by authors)

From the preceding discussion, it can be inferred that any major player in development aiming to rapidly and radically transform an industrial sector must simultaneously and continuously focus on these four key drivers:

**I. Research (Conduct research, stay updated with current knowledge in the field, and adopt best practices)**

Research plays a critical role in the planning process. Various forms of research, such as surveys, Participatory Rural Appraisals, basic and applied research, are indispensable in industry-related planning. Forward-looking nations prioritize research as a cornerstone of their development strategy. Sustainable and rapid progress hinges on active support for ongoing research and the promotion and protection of research outcomes across all fields of endeavor. Developed nations lead the way in this regard, while some developing and under-developed nations lean more towards political activities rather than fostering research. While original research efforts are commendable, building upon existing knowledge is equally important. Advancements occur by pushing the boundaries of knowledge, not by reinventing the wheel. New knowledge can emerge from various sources, and everyone should have access to scientific, technological, and other advancements for potential adoption, giving due credit to the originators of ideas. The key lies in adapting new and advanced concepts to suit local conditions and improve the existing circumstances.

**II. Production/Pilot Demonstration (Implement directly as a pilot to attract participation and create an enabling environment for entrepreneurs in the chosen field, be it agriculture, manufacturing, mining, or energy production)**

In many developing nations, prominent entrepreneurs often prefer low-risk, high-profit ventures like trading over engaging in the riskier but potentially more lucrative aspects of industrial investments. Governments can identify sectors with the potential for high employment generation and stimulate economic activities in rural areas, thereby fostering sustainable development in these communities. Governments have a responsibility to attract investors to labor-intensive, high-profit industries with significant multiplier effects. They can achieve this through pilot programs, which they may partially or fully divest from after successful establishment. Such demonstrations, guided by comprehensive industry-related planning, can significantly enhance land and economic productivity. Unused marginal land can be repurposed, and land currently utilized for low-yield crops can be dedicated to more profitable crops.

**III. Value Addition/Refining (Minimize raw material exports and prioritize value addition, as there is substantial potential for economic growth and employment in this sector. Export raw materials only when value addition is not feasible and continue to explore ways to expand this area)**

A nation that relies solely on exporting raw materials will struggle to overcome poverty. Raw materials are often sold at lower prices, particularly if they have a limited shelf life and must be disposed of quickly. For instance, Nigeria has historically exported crude oil and subsequently imported refined petroleum products, resulting in a net income loss. Lawrence (2022) outlined the economic benefits of establishing post-harvest value-adding industries, emphasizing that value addition significantly increases customer willingness to pay for agricultural products. This is due to improved product

quality, longer shelf life, and reduced pressure to sell quickly, making the business more profitable. Industry-related planning offers numerous advantages, including rapid rural development, attracting populations away from urban centers, increased employment opportunities, and the growth of ancillary service providers and suppliers. Consequently, property values appreciate, empowering landowners, and the government can invest in amenities like roads, schools, hospitals, and electricity to accommodate the growing population. While urbanization brings advantages, it also necessitates addressing associated challenges such as rising social crimes, other vices, and increased pressure on existing facilities due to population growth.

#### **IV. Market Expansion (Focus on expanding market opportunities, especially for value-added products, to enable unrestricted industry growth, with limited focus on raw material exports)**

Raw materials are in demand primarily from those capable of adding value before reaching consumers. This principle applies to mining, agriculture, and other sectors. Value addition not only broadens the market but also enhances profitability through improved product quality and cost-efficiency in production. Effective market research is vital for continually improving market share. Numerous opportunities exist both domestically and internationally, driven by market research, for selecting products for production. For instance, in the cocoa industry, in addition to adding value to cocoa products for domestic and international markets, cocoa and its refined derivatives hold high market value. These products find demand not only internally but also in export markets across Europe, America, and Asia.

To illustrate, consider the United Arab Emirates' successful development in hospitality, tourism, and hydrocarbon-related industries. This serves as a prime example of well-coordinated industrial diversification, resulting in prosperity within a relatively short timeframe. The case studies below underscore the benefits of effective participatory and holistic planning before program execution, which has led to highly successful and impactful outcomes.

#### **4. Case studies**

The four case studies are products of CIRCI's facilitation in Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria-sponsored Gbarain/Ekpetiama, Okordia/Zarama, and Kolo Creek GMOU development clusters. The first two case studies were equally submitted for the Global Regional Center for Expertise (RCE) Awards for Innovative Projects on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) (Youth Development programme in the year 2021 and Women Empowerment programmes in the year 2018) and both won in the first category of Outstanding Flagship Projects. Such awards are aimed at honouring RCEs who have made outstanding contributions to addressing local sustainable development challenges in their regions towards bridging local and global perspectives on sustainable development.

The last two case studies are the Competitive bursary programme involving two communities in Kolo Creek cluster and Sustainable Road infrastructure development in Gbarain/Ekpetiama, Okordia/Zarama and Kolo Creek clusters as components of a diversified development intervention mix. (RCE Greater Yenagoa, 2018, 2021 and 2023 reports)

#### 4.1. Case Study 1: Solving the problems of unemployment/poverty by the Gbarain/Ekpetiama kingdoms in Bayelsa State in Nigeria

Gbarain and Ekpetiama clans are well-established and notable kingdoms in Bayelsa state in Nigeria and twelve of the communities form the Gbarain/Ekpetiama cluster development area. After community needs assessment exercises in the constituent twelve communities that make up the cluster, it was observed that the priority problems requiring urgent interventions were massive poverty, general youth unemployment, lack of adequate educational support systems, and problems of water logging during the rainy seasons. After identifying the problems as facilitated by Community Inter-Relations and Conciliation Initiatives (CIRCI) the NGO, appropriate interventions were agreed upon as follows: those to be implemented in all the 12 cluster communities as cluster-wide interventions and those to be implemented separately, required by the individual communities as interventions that are peculiar to them.

It was also observed that the two segments of the community stakeholders that are most affected by these problems stated above are the youth and the women folks. To contribute towards alleviating the impacts of these problems on women folk, the development cluster earlier had agreed that 15% of every income or revenue obtained for their development will specifically be used to implement projects that are aimed at addressing the problems of the women by the women themselves. This is the subject of the second case study.

These problems listed above especially poverty, unemployment, and lack of educational support systems, have far-reaching impacts on the youths than the other segments of the community stakeholders. The idleness, increasing hunger in the land, and hopelessness being suffered by these youths are driving a number of them into a sense of hopelessness, taking hard drugs, joining cult groups, and committing of other crimes. The Gbarain/Ekpetiama Cluster Development Board (G/E-CDB) therefore chose to invest about 25% of the funds obtained from the sponsors annually in addressing these youth-related problems. Based on the need to urgently address the threats particularly posed by youth poverty and unemployment conditions, a decision was taken by all to implement one cluster-wide programme, where each of the 12 communities nominated participants for each of the 4 component projects (skill acquisition, post-graduate scholarship awards, enterprise empowerment, and inter-community wrestling and football sports competitions) in line with the agreed competitive selection processes. It involved initiating a strategic programmatic approach of formulating the goals, agreeing on the objectives, and developing interventions to address the issues holistically and in an integrated manner.

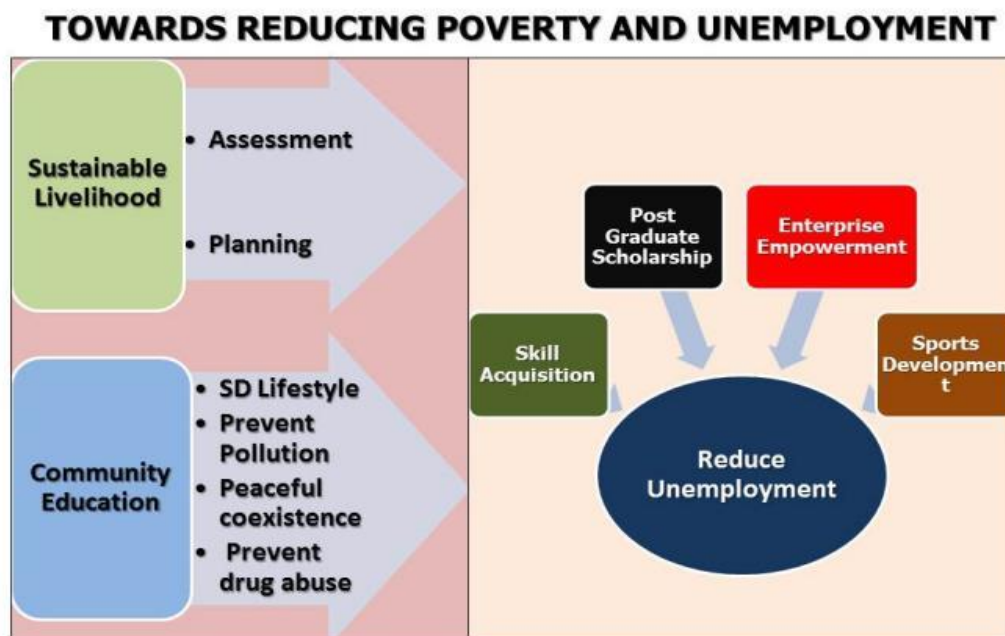
This approach was adopted to ensure the following:

- All the segments of the youths (unskilled, semi-skilled, and skilled) are carried on board. The targets were to further build the capacities of each segment of beneficiaries to become more effective, productive, and employable.
- Adopt an integrated approach and implement a programme that will synergistically and holistically better achieve the set goals and objectives.
- Ensure that community education on what sustainable development implies is always carried out before any participatory planning, implementation monitoring, etc. takes place.

Figures 4 and 5 give more elucidation to the concept.



**Figure 4.** Integrated/holistic approach to addressing youth poverty/unemployment problems using 4 inter-related interventions.



**Figure 5.** Integrated/holistic approach to address poverty/unemployment problems using 4 interventions in addition to three sustainable development enablers (sustainable livelihood assessment, participatory intervention planning, and community education). Source: Conceptualized by the Researchers (2023)

Figure 4 outlines the broad strategic concept of the youth development programme showing specific projects/schemes for skill development and skill improvement towards empowering the youths to be more

effective, productive, and employable. The figure also explains that the four broad categories of interventions are directed at resolving the same problems of pervasive poverty, lack of skills, and massive unemployment. Since the approach is essentially the empowerment of beneficiaries in nature, interrelated interventions were considered. Which also agrees with (Lawrence et al., 2023) Strategic Intelligence and Graduate Employability Framework, confirming that employability can be acquired through targeted skill and knowledge acquisition in concerned areas.

In addition to Figure 4, Figure 5 further elucidated the need to do sustainable livelihood assessments before participatory planning and subsequently after that programme implementation. The need to equally carry out community education whenever appropriate was highlighted. This programme from the year 2020 to 2022 had 4 major categories (components) of interventions that constituted the youth development programme, including skill acquisitions, post graduate scholarship, sports development interventions, enterprise improvement empowerment project.

#### 4.1.1. Skill acquisition

Due to the increasing rate of unemployment and the attendant adverse effects, it became necessary to engage the youth in vocational skill training programmes aimed at equipping them with appropriate skills and abilities to enable them to become self-employed and/or seek employment to provide for themselves the basic necessities of life. 22 skill areas/vocations including the following: Ankara making, Computer Engineering, Hairdressing, Crane Operation, Rigging and Sling, Safety, Computer Training, Video Editing, Poultry and Fish Farming, Catering, Welding, Electrical Installation, Facial Make-up/Head-tie application, Driving, as well as Fashion and Design were selected as options for the beneficiaries to choose from. Two other aspects of the scheme were: giving stipends/allowances to the benefiting participants during the 4 months of the exercise and at the end of the training each graduating participant was given a start-up grant.

The objectives of the schemes were as listed below:

- Enable youths to acquire skills/vocations for self-employment and/or job creation.
- Reduce poverty among the unemployed and idle youths in the development cluster area.
- Reduce the level of idleness among youths.
- Provide hope for a better life among youths which could also discourage them from drug abuse.
- Engage youth in a manner that would enable them to have a better purpose and meaning of living, which could hinder them from violent acts that threaten the peace, orderliness, and well-being of the Communities.
- It may in the long run also reduce the levels of different crimes in the clan.

The Skill acquisition scheme was aimed at addressing the following Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): 1 (No Poverty), 2 (No hunger), 3 (Good health and well-being), 4 (Quality education), 8 (Good jobs and economic growth) and 11 (Sustainable cities and communities)

The programme started in the year 2020 but in the year 2021, 80 youths were selected and trained by a consultant for the skill acquisition scheme. Two other aspects of the scheme were: giving stipends/allowances to the benefiting participants during the 4 months of the exercise and at the end of the training each graduating participant was given 243 US Dollars as a start-up grant. The total cost of the scheme was 111,133 US Dollars.

#### 4.1.2. Post graduate scholarship

While some of the 12 communities are individually providing some level of bursary support to their secondary school students, however, at the cluster level, it was agreed that the aim would be to motivate intelligent members of the communities that can benefit from higher education to avail themselves and achieve their potentials for the good of their individual selves and the clans at large. In the year 2020, this scheme selected 2 Master's degree and 1 Ph.D degree candidate from each of the 11 participating communities totaling 22 Master's and 11 Ph.D candidates to benefit, however in 2021 the scheme benefited 24 Master's degree and 12 PhD candidates in all the 12 communities of the cluster.

A scholarship committee was formed by the communities to manage the process. Programme was advertised widely, and selection was made from applications by interested candidates. For the Master's degree programme, candidates were given \$1,514 US Dollars annually. This amount was paid annually for 2 years. However, an extra tuition fee of \$375 US Dollars was paid if programme spilled into the third year. For the Ph.D degree programme, candidates were given \$1,972 US Dollars annually. This amount was paid annually for 3 years. However, an extra tuition fee of \$667 US Dollars was paid if programme spilled into the fourth year.

This scheme is very significant in the following ways:

- Produce high-level manpower in different fields at the master's and Doctorate degree levels for employment and growth in different sectors of work organizations.
- Increase the employment opportunities of beneficiaries in different work organizations: locally, nationally, and internationally.
- Graduates of the scheme constitute the future knowledge elites, improving the knowledge economy of the clans and the state at large.
- The overall effect of this is an enlightened and highly critical human group that would positively contribute to the sustainable development of their clans and communities.

The project is consistent with some key Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): 1 (No Poverty), 2 (No Hunger), 3 (Good health and well-being), 4 (Quality Education), 8 (Good jobs and Economic Growth), 10 (Reduced inequality) and 16 (Peace and Justice)

#### 4.1.3. Sports development interventions

Participating in sporting activities is one of the best ways to stay healthy and those who are very good at it equally get wealthy. Unhealthy people cannot be very productive in any endeavour which includes acquiring skills or undergoing other educational self-improving ventures. Since resources are limited, the stakeholders of the development cluster G/E-CDB chose two sporting events namely the inter-community football championship and the inter-community traditional wrestling championship as pilots towards achieving the following objectives:

- Provide a platform for youths of the various communities in the cluster to interact together, know each other better, and develop friendly relationships.
- Motivate the youths and point them toward the direction of self-worth, self-reliance, and working harmoniously in teams.
- Draw the minds of the youths away from possible criminality and youth restiveness.



- Allow the youths to prove their hidden talents including and specifically taking football and other sports as professions/careers.
- Create a better foundation for peace, love, and friendliness in the cluster.
- Use the competitions and the accompanying engagement processes as tools to instill a culture of discipline and discourage any youth from being involved in antisocial activities.
- Create an opportunity to build positive relationships between SPDC, the community-based Development Cluster G/E-CDB members, and the community youth stakeholders.
- Fulfil a passionate need of the youths of the cluster to organize and manage quality sports development competitions as part of management capacity-building activity.
- Enhance the reputation of all the parties, especially the sponsors of the event.

To ensure that these competitions motivate and achieve excellence, handsome prizes were awarded to the winners/champions in each of the respective categories in the keenly contested inter-community competitions.

The project was aimed at addressing the following Sustainable development goals: 1 (No poverty), 2 (Zero hunger), 3 (Good health and well-being), 4 (Quality education), 8 (Decent Work and Economic growth), 11 (Sustainable cities, Human settlements inclusive, safe and resilient).

#### *4.1.4. Enterprise improvement empowerment project*

While the skill acquisition scheme as explained above is aimed at building youths' capacities, this intervention is aimed at supporting existing agricultural businesses to improve on their current levels. Inputs like fertilizers, pesticides, and farming gadgets were given to 36 crop farmers (men and women), and dug-out canoes, fishing nets, and other fishing gears were given to 24 fishing folks (men and women) to enable them to become more productive and more effective in their chosen businesses as economic empowerment efforts.

The empowerment of the fishing and crop farming population will reduce poverty (SDG 1), reduce hunger (SDG 2), improve the health and well-being of the people (SDG 3), improve employment and economic activities (SDG 8), reduce inequality (SDG 10), improve sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11), etc.

What is the strategic rationale for this approach?

As earlier stated, the beneficiary communities made the choices of interventions after they had prioritized their most pressing developmental problems. CIRCI only facilitated the process which equally included sustainable development sensitizations on what are the basic sustainable development principles, how they can ensure project sustainability, and the need to approach development problem-solving in a holistic and integrated way.

Figures 3 and 4 had shown that this programme with 4 component de.g.,opmental interventions had met both the criteria of capturing as many segments of the target beneficiary stakeholders as possible (skill acquisition for the none skilled persons, post-graduate scholarship scheme for skilled persons, sports development for youths with that flare and enterprise improvement empowerment scheme for semi-skilled persons), provide an avenue in the future for beneficiaries in one scheme to graduate, acquire new knowledge and so qualify for another of the schemes e.g. skill acquisition beneficiaries to benefit from enterprise improvement empower scheme, etc. and that is to say it is an attempt to address the problems identified in holistic and integrated programmatic manner.

The youth development programme was a huge success, and the participants and other community stakeholders continue to say good things about the projects (RCE Greater Yenagoa, 2021).

#### 4.2. Case Study 2: Participatory implementation of women empowerment project by the women of Gbarain/Ekpetiama kingdoms in Bayelsa state in Nigeria

This second case was also implemented by the Gbarain/Ekpetiama Development Cluster. Several community developmental interventions exclude women from directly benefiting as stakeholders. This is due to several cultural and religious factors that discriminate against them and thus impede their active involvement even in developing interventions that are expected to directly benefit them.

Recent developmental approaches have recognized these issues and are making deliberate efforts for greater participation of women and are putting in place policies that ensure women are consulted and are active participants in community development. There cannot be developmental participation if a section of the stakeholders is passive or excluded. The above has been the case too for this cluster. To that effect, SPDC which is the sponsoring body developed some policies to address the problem:

- That the ten-man Community Trust in each community has at least 3 women members.
- Since the Chairman, Secretary, and Treasurer of each Community Trust are members of the supervising Cluster Development Board, the treasurer of each Community Trust must be a woman, so that she automatically becomes a member of the board at the cluster level.
- That 15% of funds contributed for community development in the community, is used for women empowerment interventions.
- Women should be encouraged to come together and collectively work to achieve commonly set goals and objectives.

During the community engagements, the NGO ensured that the above-stated policies were communicated and maintained. Women, during the community town hall meetings and also in the focused group discussions, identified access to finance as one of their priority developmental challenges and focused on income-generating projects as a way to raise some finance for their collective use. All the communities agreed to invest in housing for letting purposes as a means of sustainable income generating project since their communities are expanding due to influx of people involved in the oil and gas industry and other businesses in the area resulting in acute accommodation problems.

##### 4.2.1. Project monitoring and evaluation visits: Assessing women's perception of the project

We visited the communities and engaged them individually and collectively. We interviewed them to generate information on the following:

- I. Assess their perception of how well the projects are being implemented.
- II. Find out if they are getting value for money spent.
- III. Find out if the project is achieving the objectives, they had set for themselves in implementing the project.
- IV. Identify other challenges that the project implementation has brought about.

The findings regarding women's perception of the project were as follows:

- I. Women are happy that they implemented the projects themselves and are doing a good job.
- II. Women felt they are building the projects frugally and they discipline anyone who fails to deliver.
- III. Women are happy they were empowered to implement their projects.
- IV. They showed self-worth doing these projects with the minimal finances available.
- V. They showed enthusiasm that with time they would be able to generate enough finances to resolve some of their collective women's needs by themselves,

The women's programme has made some progress in the effort to empower and give them a voice in our communities; further actions are, however, needed as proposed below:

- I. Though the housing projects being implemented by the women are aimed at generating income and improving their financial situation, they must be mentored to diversify their efforts towards implementing more capacity-building interventions and educational support for the girl-child.
- II. To continuously improve the situation, we intend to advocate for increased participation of women in community governance.
- III. Advocate that, just as we have organized male youth associations in the communities, we should equally have female youth associations to cater to the specific developmental and political needs of the female youths.
- IV. Advocate that education support, scholarship, and bursary assistance to indigent community girls be given some recognition and priority.
- V. Advocate for skill acquisition programmes for girls as well as for male youths.
- VI. To ensure sustainability and ensure project maintenance, women will agree on how best to utilize/reinvest the income that will be generated from the project when in use.

#### 4.2.2. Cost of the project

Each twin self-contained building costs about 14,444 USD on average. The women empowerment programme will reduce poverty (SDG 1), reduce hunger (SDG 2), the intervention is achieving gender equality and is empowering women (SDG 5), improve employment and economic activities (SDG 8), build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusiveness and foster innovation (SDG 9), reduce inequality (SDG 10), improve sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11) (RCE Greater Yenagoa report 2018).

#### 4.3. Case Study 3: Solving the issue of out-of-school children in two communities within the Kolo Creek Cluster in Bayelsa State, Nigeria

Kolo Creek GMOU Development cluster is the second development cluster, CIRCI mentored for some years in Bayelsa state. This cluster was equally sponsored by SPDC. Educational development at any level is imperative for the development of youths in Society. Generally, the people of Imiringi and Elebele communities are aware of the importance of education in their developmental aspirations. The cost of education, the poor background of many families in the communities for some indigent fellows, the cost of paying the fees for the final secondary school examinations (West African School Certificate Examinations - WASCE), the purchase of school uniforms, and the cost of university education stand as major challenges the people face due to endemic poverty of the community members. These factors including others seem to have combined to cause a setback in terms of the high occurrence of the number of out-of-school children in many communities in Nigeria. Aware

that development in education determines the well-being and sustained overall socio-economic development of people, the communities decided to spend an amount of money from their development fund for projects to implement this scheme annually. Imiringi community had been spending about 12% of the mandate it gets from the Global Memorandum of Understanding (GMOU) the community entered with Shell Petroleum Development Company Nigeria Limited (SPDC) and her joint venture partners, who are operating within their community's environment. Equally, Elebele spent about 10% of its mandated annual subvention from SPDC on this programme.

The educational support scheme is to support the education of intending and deserving indigents of the community at secondary and tertiary educational institutions within Nigeria. In line with the stipulated processes of implementing sustainable and participatory community development interventions, these projects started in both communities only after the sustainable livelihood and need assessment exercises were carried out, where these interventions were identified and given a good ranking in their prioritized intervention lists.

Projects to be implemented by communities are those that are of the highest priority and executable within the budget that is available to the communities. While the Imirni community ranked educational challenges as the 4th out of 7 pressing challenges, the Elebele community ranked it as the 2nd most pressing need out of 6 identified challenges and both communities identified competitive educational support (bursary) scheme as an intervention to ameliorate the situation they have identified.

Poverty or lack of finance by many individuals in Nigeria means that they cannot fund developmental activities including paying for their wards' schooling needs. The third and fourth problems stem from this situation. This can be corroborated by the latest assessment that 33% of Nigerians (70 million out of about 200 million people) are living in extreme poverty (World Population Review, 2022).

The lack of adequate educational support for community members has always been considered one of the priorities by community stakeholders. Funding students' education in terms of paying school fees and generally, the financial needs of students are a major challenge for people that are not financially comfortable. As a result of this problem, many children in Nigeria are out of school. The World Bank has said that Nigeria has the highest number of out-of-school children in the world with 11 million pupils recorded in 2020. (Busari, 2022).

The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) in collaboration with the Bayelsa State government (Imirni and Elebele are communities in this state) commenced a school enrolment campaign in Yenagoa aimed at reducing the increasing rate of out-of-school children in the state, which is put at 265,000 as at January 2019. (Oduma, 2022).

While these communities cannot fund the schooling of every child in their communities on their own, they can contribute their quota to reducing the effects of the problem. They, therefore, chose to develop this competitive selection by merit intervention to ensure that every intelligent child in these communities, who if educated will mostly use capacity building to better him or herself, and in the long run these bright individuals are not denied education.

#### *4.3.1. Award amounts and beneficiaries*

Each student was given the following amounts annually:

## Imiringi community

- i. Secondary school level 75 US Dollars per student
- ii. Tertiary Institution 200 US Dollars per student

## Elebele community

- i. Secondary school level 50 US Dollars per student
- ii. Tertiary Institution 125 US Dollars per student

Qualification for receiving the awards included:

- For the secondary school awards: Students of J.S.1 to S.S.2 FROM RECOGNISED Secondary Schools
- For the higher institution awards: Candidates that have been offered verified admission to higher institutions from recognized Nigerian Universities, Polytechnics, and Colleges of Education.
- Candidates who are indigenous to Imiringi or Elebele Communities respectively.

#### 4.3.2. Number of beneficiaries per community per year

Table 1 displays the number of students that have benefited in Imiringi for the last 3 years. The same beneficiaries are paid annually for the 3 years. Table 2, on the other hand, depicts the number of students who benefited from the scheme in 2022 in the Elebele community, as their scheme only commenced in that year.

**Table 1.** Number of beneficiaries from Imiringi community competitive bursary award scheme

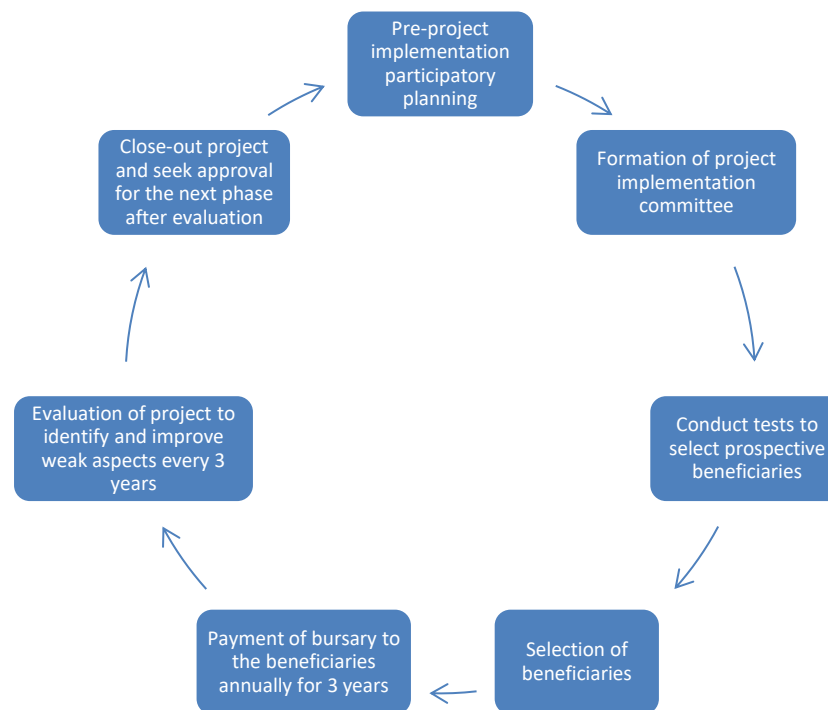
ITEM	CATEGORY	YEAR	YEAR	YEAR	TOTAL
		2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	
Secondary School Awards	Males	51	51	51	153
	Females	49	49	49	147
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>300</b>
University Awards	Males	40	40	40	120
	Females	60	60	60	180
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>300</b>

**Table 2.** Number of beneficiaries from Elebele community competitive bursary award scheme

ITEM	CATEGORY	YEAR 2022/2023
Secondary School Awards	Males	40
	Females	40
	<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>
University Awards	Males	46
	Females	38
	<b>Total</b>	<b>84</b>

### 4.3.3. Project implementation process

Figure 6 shows the project implementation process. Community using participatory rural appraisal tools facilitated by a development agency prioritized their development areas requiring urgent interventions and then the communities also identified the suitable interventions that can be implemented within the budgetary constraints they have. After that, each community plans the implementation of the project and sets up a committee to execute the project. Following the steps, as shown in the figure below, the community implements the projects and carries out annual reviews/monitoring and project evaluations after every three years of implementation. Another approval is sought after such an evaluation to commence a new round of the project.



**Figure 6.** Project Implementation Process

The scheme ensures the achievement of the following objectives:

- I. Provide funding as an incentive to motivate all bright and intelligent children to attend secondary school and also get a university education.
- II. Provide motivation for all children to work hard, read effectively, and compete to qualify for the awards.
- III. Improve the general standard of education in the communities since every student will work hard to be selected.
- IV. Improve the availability of highly qualified professionals in every field, over the years through this intervention. That is, it will produce high-level manpower in different fields at the first-degree level for employment in every sector of the economy and admission into postgraduate programmes.

- V. It will assist and reduce the financial burden experienced by poor students/parents.

The beneficiaries were interviewed as a feedback mechanism after every award session, and they were always having glowing things to say about the programme (RCE Greater Yenagoa Report 2022).

#### 4.4. Case Study 4: Sustainable road infrastructure development in Gbarain/Ekpetiama, Okordia/Zarama and Kolo Creek clusters as a component of diversified development intervention

Case Study 4 involved evaluating the needs of a larger area, such as a cluster of communities or even an entire state, by collectively analyzing the various participatory priority rankings of needs or developmental challenges within the constituent communities.

Community Inter-Relations and Conciliation Initiative (NGO) facilitated the needs assessment of 25 communities as follows: Gbarain/Ekpetiama cluster (12 communities), Okordia/Zarama cluster (9 communities), and Kolo Creek cluster (4 communities) and these communities individually followed the developmental process to assess and rank their priority needs. The NGO then analyzed all the 25 priority rankings to evaluate if there is a trend in the identified and ranked needs of the various communities and if the key developmental challenges were similar. Such an analysis will be a powerful strategy for inferential decision-making towards identifying suitable intervention candidates that can be applied on a larger scale basis to benefit more people as cluster-wide or region-wide intervention. This needs assessment exercise was carried out for all the under listed 25 communities in Table 3.

The third last row of the table shows the cumulative ranking score for each identified problem. The second last row shows the mean ranking derived from dividing the total by the number of communities (25). The table showed that water-logging was ranked the most pressing problem, followed by acute unemployment. The third most pressing problem they identified was access to quality education. The problem of constant availability of electricity supply came fourth while lack of finance to do business came fifth. There were other problems mentioned by the communities but the five listed above were the most important priorities they identified in that exercise.

The water-logging problem causes difficulty for people to move around within the communities, and it also produces conditions for the breeding of mosquitoes that cause malaria disease. After the problem identification, the communities decided to implement concrete road projects with drainage. The choice of road type by the communities is of concrete nature, obtained from a mixture of cement, aggregate (granite) and sand, and such roads withstand the environmental and physical stress they are exposed to better and are invariably more durable. The road construction usually involves the following:

- Clearing of the proposed route
- Removal of vegetable topsoil
- Excavation of side drains
- Construction of drainage form-work
- Casting of bottom and side concrete drainage
- Filling with sharp sand
- Casting of the concrete road pavement

**Table 3.** A summary of the priority rankings given by the individual communities to the major development challenges they identified.

SN	Development Cluster	Community	RANK				
			Seasonal Water-logging	Poor access to education	Acute Unemployment	Lack of finance for business	No constant electricity supply
1		Agbia	3	5	2	6	1
2		Ayama	2	3	5	7	2
3		Gbarantoru	1	7	1	5	3
4		Koroama	4	2	2	1	6
5		Kumbuama	7	2	3	5	1
6	Gbarain/ Ekpetiama	Neduga	3	6	4	2	1
7		Obunagha	1	5	3	6	2
8		Ogboloma	6	5	2	8	7
9		Okolobiri	3	5	4	10	1
10		Okotiamia	1	5	4	9	6
11		Polaku	1	3	2	5	9
12		Tunuama	1	3	4	14	2
13		Elebele	1	2	5	7	4
14	Kolo Creek	Imiringi	1	4	3	8	5
15		Otuasega	2	10	18	9	7
16		Yiba-Ama	1	11	6	17	20
17		Agbobiri	1	10	9	5	3
18		Akumoni	1	6	5	3	10
19		Ayamabele	1	3	4	9	9
20	Okordia/ Zarama	Epie-Zarama	2	7	6	8	3
21		Free-Town	1	3	2	4	8
22		Ikarama	2	4	3	10	14
23		Kalaba	1	2	5	4	10
24		New-Jerusalem	2	5	6	7	1
25		Nyambiri	3	5	6	2	1
Cumulative score from individual ranking			52	123	114	171	136
Average ranking score			2.08	4.92	4.56	6.84	5.44
Ranking in terms of most challenging			1st	3rd	2nd	5th	4th

Eighty (80) road projects have been completed by these three development clusters between 2018 and 2023, and Nineteen (19) of the roads were completed between September 2022 to August 2023. The total cost



of the nineteen road projects from start to completion was approximately Seven Hundred and Two Thousand One Hundred and forty US Dollars and Twenty-One cents (\$702,140.21). This figure was derived by dividing the actual Naira cost equivalent of the project by 440. Though the exchange rates were not static during the project implementation period, Naira got devalued from about 325 Naira to 1 US Dollar in 2018 to about 460 just before the end of 2022. For this report, we used the estimated exchange rate of 440 Naira to 1 USD for convenience only.

The beauty of this approach includes the ability to develop a bigger picture of the key issues common to a larger area and how a government can apply available meagre funds to effect greater impacts. Their prioritization of some infrastructure projects over human capital development projects in this case is understandable since in developing nations, there is a high deficit of necessary infrastructure. In view of that, it will be difficult for them not to apply some of their funds to implementing some critical infrastructure like the construction of water schemes, roads, market stalls, extension of electricity to new community areas, and installation of electricity transformers, among many.

The report has shown a remarkable improvement in the quality of the internal roads in these 25 communities over the period. With these efforts, these communities are achieving in principle the aspirations of the SDG11, and the credit goes to the sole sponsors of these interventions being SPDC.

There is high local content in the project implementation as community members served as the contractors or nominated pre-qualified contractors that bided for and executed the jobs. These contractors were actively supervised by SPDC's employed Engineers to ensure quality control and assurance. The CDBs were awarded and managed the project implementation process along with the sponsor. (RCE Greater Yenagoa Report 2023)

The four cases reported above show that developmental planning at the community level and beyond should be holistic and participatory. The first thing to do after the pre-community entry activities, are to carry out a Participatory Rural Appraisal using the necessary participatory and developmental planning tools. One of the outcomes of such planning will be listing and prioritizing the ranking of the community developmental problems or challenges and agreeing on the possible interventions that can appropriately address the identified challenges and how to go about implementing these interventions within the budgetary, legal, human, and other environmental constraints. For coordinated and holistic planning, as was the situation with the reported cases here, the communities allocated some percentages of the already known budget envelope to priority areas. It enabled the community not to spend all its resources on only infrastructure projects like road construction since a holistic approach requires that the interest of the more vulnerable segments of the stakeholders like women and youths be considered too.

For case one on the youth development programme, several related interventions were agreed upon to address the problems so that all the aspects of the youth stakeholder segment are taken on board (unskilled, semiskilled and, skilled) and the interventions were interlinked in a way that one intervention can build the capacity of an individual to then qualify to benefit from another intervention.

The other three cases reported were more focused on solving identified challenges (one for women, another for young schooling people, and the last for the whole community) but greater precision of purpose was achieved through the participatory and holistic approaches adopted.

## 5. Conclusion

The strength of the participatory and holistic developmental approaches included the following:

- I. They are beneficially driven and do not have a top-down approach. Though they involve several stakeholders, the beneficiaries play a major role in deciding what they want. Information will flow in both directions through dialogue and consultations and so it is not a top-down and one-way information flow system.
- II. They are strategically developed where goals and objectives are agreed upon and the interventions generated from the beneficiaries in line with budgetary constraints and bearing in mind the need to make the programmes as holistic/integrated as possible.
- III. They are broad-based and aimed at addressing more of the stakeholder segments. All the stakeholders (if the community then the men, women, youths, and leaders) are consulted to make inputs.
- IV. Community education is an integral part of such programmes. Facilitators of intervention implementation should be able to assess the capacity gaps of the beneficiaries for them to be able to participate effectively and fully take over for management of the intervention on completion. Every community entry or every intervention that requires input from the masses must start with education. Even to carry out a referendum in a nation, we must start with citizen education to ensure that those that are ignorant will have enough knowledge to take informed decisions. Community education is key for us to have successful sustainable development.

From the above, stakeholders' participation is critical for the effective implementation of sustainable community development, and it is equally beneficial for all aspects of sustainability. Stakeholders' participation must be broad-based involving the leaders, men, women, and youths. A community development plan is central to sustainable community development. It is one of the key inputs to making other large-scale development plans. Community development plans should be revalidated from time to time, and they are equally prerequisites before interventions are decided. After which a detailed professional project plan has to be made for project implementation.

Development planning should not be ad-hoc. The community, Local government area (LGA), state, and nation should have development plans stipulating where and when proposed amenities, schools, hospitals, cemeteries, national parks, game reserves, strategic roads, rail lines, industries, universities, and so on, would be located and this plan should be reviewed at specific intervals for example, while the national development plans can be reviewed every eight (8) years, the state and LGA plans should be reviewed at shorter period of four (4) year and community development plans being more detailed and more prone to changes need to be revalidated every other year. Ideally, there should be a two-way information flow process in planning at all levels. Every community development plan should feed into the LGA development plan and vice versa, same with constituent LGAs and their states, and equally, between the states' development plans and the national development plan. By implication, community representatives should be part of the LGA development planning team and LGA focal points are part of the state development planning and so on. Participation of beneficiaries in the formulation of sustainable development intervention is critical to ensuring a robust outcome and the process of developing any intervention must be holistic and multifaceted considering (as much as possible) most of the factors within which the developmental challenge requiring intervention is situated. A well-coordinated sustainable development intervention is not likely to fail. Different interventions

may require somewhat different approaches, but all interventions should have participation and all the relevant components should be integrated as essential requirements.

In summary, we can say that in order to ensure synergistic outcomes, a multifaceted programmatic approach should be adopted to implement development programmes. Citizen/community/beneficiary participation and integrated coordination of all developmental efforts in every locality (as much as possible) are essential. In addition, identifying industries where specific localities have comparative advantages and developing such industry-related programmes results in the best sustainable development outcomes. This conceptual exposition has examined these issues and provided insights from fresh perspectives.

Though the cases use are mainly for community development, the principles expounded here are equally applicable for any type of planning including business, making and other activities as beneficiary participation and holistic planning are critical elements for success.

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