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IMPACT OF COMMUNITY SELF-HELP INITIATIVES ON THE ATTAINMENT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS 1 AND 2 IN IKOT EKPENE SENATORIAL DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the impact of community self-help initiatives on the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals 1 (no poverty) and 2 (zero hunger') in Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Two research questions guided the study. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study with a sample of 728 respondents selected from the population of 72,099 members of the various registered community development associations in the study area. Both stratified and accidental sampling techniques were used. A validated questionnaire titled Community Self-Help Initiatives and the Attainment of Sustainable Development Goals One & Two (No Poverty & Zero Hunger) Questionnaire (CSHIASDGQ) was used to collect data for the study. The reliability of the instrument was done using Cronbach alpha reliability and result showed the reliability index range from 0.70 and 0.84. Descriptive statistical

analysis such as mean, standard deviation, frequency, percentages and graphs were used to analyze data for the study. The results revealed that community road network and vocational skills training initiatives has a strong positive impact on the attainment of SDG 1 (No Poverty) and SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) in the study area. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that government should prioritize the construction and maintenance of roads to enhance transportation, facilitate trade, and boost agricultural productivity. Better road networks will improve market access and create more economic opportunities.

Keywords: Community, Self-Help Initiatives, Attainment and Sustainable Development Goal

Introduction

The global push for sustainable development was reinvigorated with the adoption of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, serving as a comprehensive framework for addressing global challenges such as poverty, hunger, inequality, and environmental degradation. Among the 17 goals, Sustainable Development Goal 1 (SDG 1) aims to "end poverty in all its forms everywhere," while Sustainable Development Goal 2 (SDG 2) seeks to "end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, as well promote sustainable agriculture" by 2030 (United Nations, 2023). In sub-Saharan Africa, including Nigeria, these goals are particularly urgent given the region's high poverty rates and food insecurity levels. Despite being resource-rich, Nigeria continues to face structural economic challenges that have resulted in widespread poverty and hunger. As of 2022, over 133 million Nigerians were reported to be multidimensionally poor, with the rural population being the most affected (National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 2022). Similarly, food insecurity remains a critical issue, especially in rural and semi-urban communities, where subsistence farming is predominant, and access to modern agricultural inputs and infrastructure is limited (Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2021).

Poverty and hunger are interwoven concepts which are universally acknowledged as monumental threats to human and material development. Poverty is the scarcity or the lack of

certain (variant) amount of material possession(s) or money. It is multifaceted concept(s), which may include social, economic and political elements. World Bank (2019) defined poverty as pronounced deprivation in well-being, which comprise of many dimensions. It includes low incomes and the inability to acquire the basic goods and services necessary for survival with dignity. Poverty also encompasses low levels of health and education, poor access to clean water and sanitation, inadequate physical security, lack of voice and insufficient capacity and opportunity to better one's life. Poverty is usually measured as either absolute or relative (the latter being actually an index of income inequality) World Bank (2019). While hunger according to the United Nations (2023) refers to the periods when people experience severe food insecurity, meaning that they stay for days without eating due to lack of money, access to food, or other resources. Hunger is the distress associated with lack of food. The threshold for food deprivation, or undernourishment, is fewer than 1,800 calories per day.

It is in light of the above background that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were conceived at the United Nations Conference on sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro in 2012. The objective was to produce a set of universal goals that will meet the urgent environmental, political and economic challenges facing the world. The SDGs replaced the millennium development goals (MDGs), which started a global effort in 2000 to tackle poverty and hunger. The MDGs established measurable, universally agreed objectives for tackling extreme poverty and hunger, preventing deadly diseases and expanding primary education to all children, among other development priorities (SDG Manual 2015). The legacy and achievement of MDGs provided the valuable lessons and for the emergence of the new goals in 2015. The necessity to reverse global challenges of poverty and hunger gave impetus to the advocacy of community self-help initiatives in other to aid in the achievement of SDGs.

Community self-help initiatives are activities carried out by individuals, households or community members aimed at improving the socio-economic status of the community. Therefore, these activities could be carried out collectively by members of the community engaging in self-help activities. Self-help initiatives are strategies to promote better living conditions for the whole community with or without external assistance. Self-help initiatives are concerted effort (voluntary) made by members of the community towards achieving the well-being and improvement of such a community. The approach to community development seeks to optimally harness the resources (human and material) of the affected community in order to improve the living standard of the people. In many rural Nigerian communities, including those in the Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State**,** self-help efforts have become vital mechanisms for survival and progress. The district, which includes local government areas such as Ikot Ekpene, Essien Udim, and Obot Akara, is largely agrarian and culturally rooted in communal living. Faced with limited access to basic services and infrastructure, residents have often come together to initiate projects such as community roads, boreholes, health centers, cooperative farms, and small-scale agro-processing ventures (Effiong & Udo, 2021). These community-driven actions are increasingly recognized as effective tools in addressing poverty and food insecurity, aligning with the targets of SDG 1 and SDG 2 at the grassroots level. Self-help initiatives are not only cost-effective but also foster a sense of agency, accountability, and long-term sustainability. They also help build social capital, promote community resilience, and enhance collective problem-solving abilities (Uchenna & Dan, 2020).

Thus, the introduction of SDGs in September, 2015 by the UN general Assembly, has given communities across the world including Nigeria and Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District in particular an impetus to engage in anti-poverty & hunger programmes through self-help initiatives. It's based

on this premise that this study investigated the role and effectiveness of community self-help initiatives in achieving SDG 1 and SDG 2 within Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Statement of problem

Despite significant global, national, and regional efforts to reduce poverty and hunger, many communities in Nigeria, including those in the Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State, continue to grapple with widespread poverty, food insecurity, and underdevelopment. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) One and Two (No Poverty and Zero Hunger) remain critical challenges in these communities. While government interventions and donor-supported programmes have been implemented, their reach and sustainability are often limited due to bureaucratic inefficiencies, inadequate funding, and poor community engagement. A cursory glance on the attainment of SDGs (1&2) in Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State shows that hunger, ill-health, malnutrition, premature deaths of mothers and infants, poor housing, gross lack of essential amenities, low income, poor sanitation, communal clashes, lack of safe source of drinking water, poor healthcare services, people living below the "minimum benchmark of 1.25 dollars per day", gender inequality, increase in child mortality rate, poor standard of living and other high poverty-driven conditions are still commonplace. To add to these, poor families experience much more stress than middle – class families. Besides financial uncertainty, these families are more likely to be exposed to series of negative events such as illness, depression, eviction, joblessness, criminal victimization and family death. Furthermore, the researcher has keenly observed that social problems such as low income, low productivity, high rate of unemployment, inadequate proper health care services, inadequate supply of portable drinking water, poor sanitary condition which leads to disease outbreak, poor road infrastructure due to

failed culverts and mini-bridges causing untold hardship for farmers to have easy access to their farmlands are still prevalent in Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State.

In response to these challenges, local residents have initiated various community self-help projects such as cooperative farming, skills acquisition programmes, community savings groups, construction & rehabilitation of rural road network, provision of portable water supply and food distribution schemes among others. These grassroots efforts are often borne out of necessity and local solidarity, and in many cases, they have provided essential support where formal institutions have failed. However, there is limited evidence on the extent to which these self-help initiatives contribute meaningfully to the achievement of SDG 1 and 2 in the local context. Moreover, there is a lack of comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness, sustainability, and scalability of these initiatives, especially in addressing the underlying socio-economic disparities and structural challenges in Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District. Questions remain as to whether these community-driven efforts are strategically aligned with national and global development agendas, and if they have the capacity to produce measurable impacts on poverty reduction and food security.

This study, therefore, sought to investigate the role and impact of community self-help initiatives in achieving Sustainable Development Goal One and Two in Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District. It aims to bridge the knowledge gap, inform policy, and propose practical strategies for strengthening community-driven development as a tool for sustainable transformation.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the extent to which community self-help initiatives could assist in the attainment of sustainable development goals 1 & 2 of ('no poverty and zero hunger'). The study specifically sought to;

1. Investigate the impact of the provision of community road network initiatives on the attainment of SDGs 1 and 2 (no poverty and zero hunger)
2. Ascertain the impact of the provision of community vocational skills training initiatives on the attainment of SDGs 1 and 2 (no poverty and zero hunger)

Research questions

The following research questions were posed to guide the study;

1. What is the impact of the provision of community road network initiatives on the attainment of SDG 1 and 2 (no poverty and zero hunger) in Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State?
2. What is the impact of the provision of community vocational skills training initiatives on the attainment of SDGs 1 and 2 (no poverty and zero hunger) in Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State?

Provision of Community Road Network Initiatives and Attainment of Sustainable Development Goals 1 And 2

Rural communities in developing countries are often completely disconnected from the major roads, rail lines and public transport services that enable them access the economic and social activities and opportunities in cities (High-level Advisory Group on sustainable transport, 2016). Thus, rural roads network becomes the main pivot in enabling the rural poor to emerge from poverty and overcome social exclusion by connecting their goods to markets and linking rural areas to market towns, large cities and the global market place. Accessibility to the rural area by road is a key factor in achieving Sustainable Development Goals in pursuance of optimal survival of these areas. An empirical study on assessment of the impact of rural transport on rural

development: a case study of Obokun Local Government Area of Osun State, Nigeria was carried out by Adedeji, Olafiaji, Olanibi and Lukman (2018). Survey research design was adopted for the study. Randomized systematic stratified sampling technique was applied in the selection of communities used for the survey, and a total of three hundred community dwellers were selected and used for the study. The questionnaire was used to obtain information from the respondents. Data was generated and analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequency and simple percentages. The findings of the study revealed an inequality in the provision of road infrastructure and rehabilitation of roads in the area, resulting to disparities in the level of development. The poor condition of roads in the area is having negative effects on agricultural activities which is the major source of income of residents, thereby increasing their poverty rate.

Various rural development policies have been instituted in Nigeria to alleviate the condition of rural dwellers and to sustain agricultural development, yet the smooth accessibility desires of several rural areas is still impaired by poor rural road infrastructure. The effect of this is low agricultural productivity in rural areas and food insecurity. Rural communities in developing countries are mostly disconnected from the major roads and public transport services that should provide them access to the economic and social opportunities in cities. Good rural road infrastructure and services promote connectivity and social cohesion, drive commercial activities as well as accessibility to social and economic facilities necessary to reduce poverty, isolation and social exclusion. Similarly, Aginde (2021) conducted a study on rural road network and socio-economic development of rural farmers in Ika North Local Government Area of Delta. Survey research design was used. 300 respondents were randomly sampled for the study. In testing the hypothesis, which states that, there is no significant relationship between the provision of rural road and socio-economic development. Pearson product moment correlation analysis was used for data interpretation. The result of this analysis revealed that, the calculated r-value of 0.1429 was greater than the critical r-value of 0.154 when tested at 0.05 level of significance with 224 degrees

of freedom. This implies that there is a positive relationship between rural road network and socio-economic development of rural farmers in Ika North Local Government Area of Delta State. The study further revealed that improved rural roads drive sustainable rural development and national growth.

FAO (2018) reports that better rural transport is key for food security and zero hunger. The report further explained that improving rural road infrastructure leads to lower costs for farm inputs and lower transport costs for marketed outputs, thus increasing agricultural production to enhance food security.

Provision of community vocational skills training initiatives and attainment of sustainable development goals 1&2

The concept of vocational training refers to an individual learning a unique set of skills which lead to an acquisition of a skill-set bordering on how to work (Inyang &Agwadu, 2017). This implies that acquisition of vocational skills refers to an individual equipped with skills bordering on having the ability to be self-employed or to be employed so as to display the acquired skills for remuneration. According to Tombari & Onyemauchukwu (2017), vocational training programmes are training opportunities designed for individuals to acquire skills which will address issues of unemployment, poverty alleviation and socio-economic empowerment. Inyang and Agwadu (2017) investigated how vocational skills acquisition by poor rural dwellers in Nigeria had served to empower them in a study which employed a survey design. Rural dwellers who took part in vocational intervention programmes organized by government and NGOs made up the population while 300 respondents were randomly and purposively drawn. In the study's questionnaire, an enquiry elicited responses concerning their perceptions of the programmes (both positive and negative). Using descriptive statistics for data analysis, most of them revealed they were not only very satisfied with the programmes, but that their socio-

economic status (poverty levels) would certainly change. On the other hand, most of them decried the very high cost of the training programmes. This meant that even as most of them were very appreciative of the programmes, most still bemoaned the exorbitant cost of the programmes.

The various areas where skills could be acquired in this regard include – building trades (block laying/concreting, carpentry/joinery, plumbing, steel works, painting/decorating, draughtsmanship); electronics/electrical trades (general house wiring, electrical appliances' repairs); metal works (welding/fabrication); auto general works (auto mechanics, auto body works, auto electricals) and business studies (secretarial studies, ICT studies) (Pongo, Effah, Osei-Owusu, Obinnim & Sam, 2019). Vocational skills training programmes are non-formal in nature which makes it attractive to youths. The programmes are flexible, diverse and adaptable to the various needs and circumstances of unemployed youths. Vocational training provides appropriate training that is needed to enable the individual to enter into his/her chosen occupations. A descriptive survey design was employed in an assessment of the role of technical and vocational education (TVET) in influencing poverty reduction amongst Nigerian youths by Uddin (2018). Youths in all TVET Training Colleges in Edo State served as population. 150 of them were randomly sampled and one of the quantitatively designed posers they responded to was concerned with ascertaining whether TVET training can be used to ensure poverty reduction in the country. Mean scores were used to analyze the responses (with a reference mean of 2.50) and the result revealed that with a mean score of 3.12, TVET training to youths could be employed as a strategy to ensure poverty reduction in the country. This meant that by applying the strategy of youths undergoing TVET-related trainings, the scourge of poverty could be reduced in the country. Basil (2024) opined that skill acquisition programmes embark by any agency of government seeks to improve human development where youths in communities would play a major role in their own development

making use of local resources. He further stressed that skill acquisition programmes enables the youth to take advantage of economic opportunity and confers access to basic life sustaining social services.

Literatures reviewed revealed that studies had been conducted around the attainment of some key indicators of SDGs but to the best of theseresearchers' knowledge, none have investigated community self-help initiative and attainment of SDGs 1 and 2 in Ikot Ekpene the way the present study sought to do.

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive survey research design was utilized for this study. The population of this study comprised of 72,099 registered adult males and females 18 years and above in the various community development associations that exists in the ten LGAs in Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State. The registered adults are considered appropriate for the study because of their level of experience and exposure to social issues in their different communities. The stratified and accidental sampling techniques were used to select seven hundred and twenty-eight (728) adult male and female respondents randomly selected from the sampled LGAs in Ikot Ekpene senatorial District. A questionnaire tagged "Community Self-Help Initiatives and the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals one & two (No Poverty& Zero Hunger) (CSHASDGSQ) served as the study's instrument for data collection. The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach Alpha. The coefficients of the sub-scale are .70 and .84. The coefficients were deemed high enough for the instruments to be considered reliable for data collection. Data were collected by the researchers and analyzed using Descriptive statistics (percentages, frequencies and Bar chart).

Results

Research question one

What is the impact of the provision of community road network initiatives on the attainment of SDG 1 and 2 (no poverty and zero hunger) in Ikot Ekpene senatorial district of Akwa Ibom State? The result is shown in Table 1 and Fig 1.

Table 1

Descriptive analysis of the Impact of the provision of community road networks initiatives on the attainment of SDG 1 and 2 (no poverty and zero hunger) in Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State (n= 728)

S/N	VARIABLE/ITEM	Agree	Disagree
	Community road network initiative	Freq/percent	Freq/percent
1	The availability of access road has improved business in my community	429 (58.9)	299 (41.1)
2	The creation of new road networks in my community has allowed farmers to easily market their farm produce	412 (56.6)	316(43.4)
3	Rehabilitation of roads has facilitated employment opportunities for people in my community	420 (57.7)	308(42.3)
4	Members of my community have easy access to the market due to accessible road network	397 (54.5)	331 (45.5)
5	Members can have easy access to their farmlands which has increased agricultural production	399 (54.8)	329 (45.2)
6	Accessible road network has boosted economic activities in my community	402 (55.2)	326 (44.8)

Table 1 provides a descriptive analysis of how community road network initiatives in the Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State contribute to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1 and 2, which focus on eradicating poverty and hunger. The data is

based on responses from 728 participants, highlighting their perceptions on the impact of road infrastructure on various aspects of community life.

A majority of respondents (58.9%) agreed that the availability of access roads has improved business activities in their community, while 41.1% disagreed. This indicates that improved road infrastructure is playing a significant role in enhancing local commerce for a substantial portion of the population. Similarly, 56.6% of participants agreed that the creation of new road networks has enabled farmers to easily transport and market their farm produce, though 43.4% disagreed. This suggests that better road connectivity is facilitating agricultural trade for over half of the community members, which is crucial for reducing hunger and improving livelihoods.

Regarding employment opportunities, 57.7% of respondents agreed that the rehabilitation of roads has created jobs for people in their community, while 42.3% disagreed. This underscores the role of road infrastructure in generating employment, which is essential for poverty alleviation. Additionally, 54.5% of participants agreed that accessible road networks have made it easier for community members to reach markets, though 45.5% disagreed. This highlights the importance of road improvements in enhancing market access, which is vital for both economic activities and food security.

Furthermore, 54.8% of respondents agreed that accessible road networks have made it easier for community members to access their farmlands, leading to increased agricultural production, while 45.2% disagreed. This demonstrates that road infrastructure is positively influencing agricultural productivity for a majority of the population, which is critical for achieving zero hunger. Finally, 55.2% of participants agreed that accessible road networks have boosted overall economic activities in their community, while 44.8% disagreed. This suggests that

road improvements are contributing to broader economic growth, which aligns with the goals of reducing poverty and hunger.

In sum, the data reveals that community road network initiatives are perceived by a majority of respondents as having a positive impact on business activities, agricultural trade, employment opportunities, market access, agricultural productivity, and overall economic development in the Ikot Ekpene senatorial district. However, the significant proportion of respondents who disagreed (ranging from 41.1% to 45.5%) indicates that the benefits of these initiatives are not uniformly experienced across the community. This underscores the need for targeted efforts to ensure that road infrastructure improvements reach all segments of the population, particularly those most vulnerable to poverty and hunger.

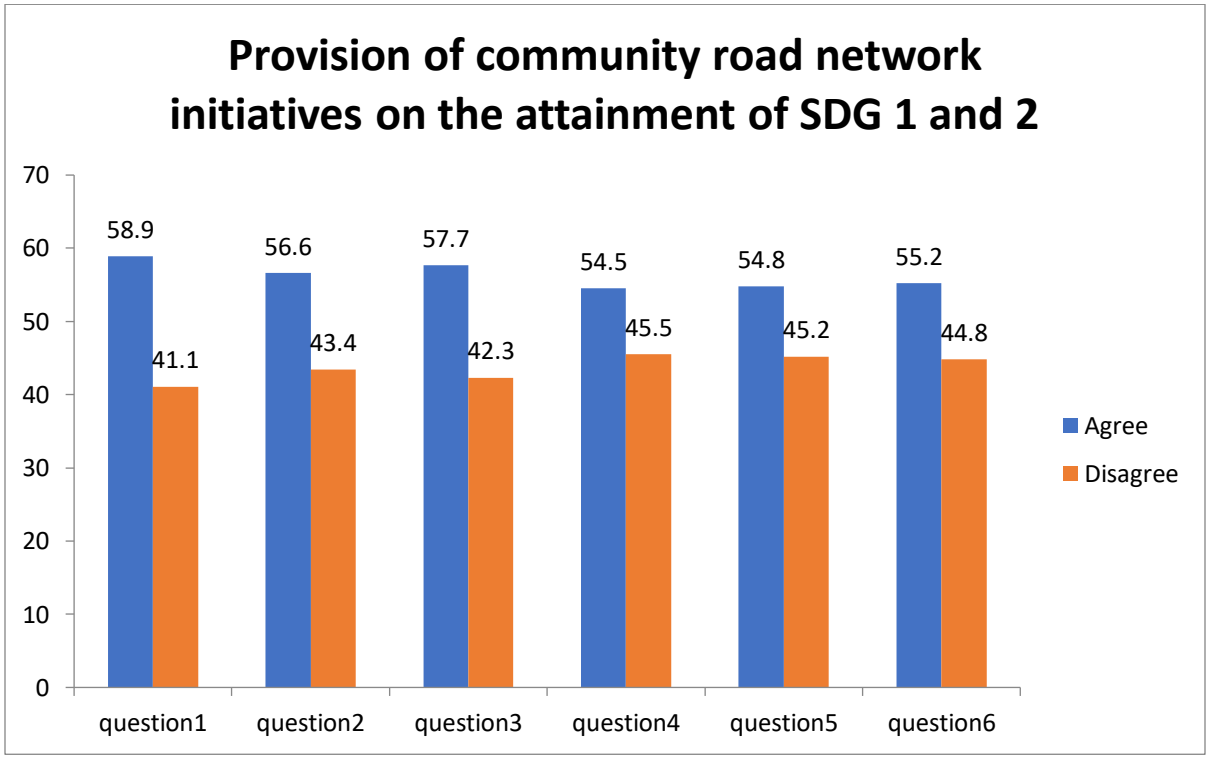

Figure 1: Bar chart showing responses regarding provision of community road network initiatives on the attainment of SDG 1 and 2 (no poverty and zero hunger) in Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State.

Research Question 2: What is the impact of the provision of community vocational skills training initiatives on the attainment of SDGs 1 and 2 (no poverty and zero hunger) in Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State?

In order to address this research question, Descriptive statistics was used and the result shown in Table 2 and Fig 2.

Table 2: Descriptive analysis of the provision of community vocational skills training initiatives on the attainment of SDG 1 and 2 (no poverty and zero hunger) in Ikot Ekpene senatorial district of Akwa Ibom State (n= 728)

	Community vocational skills training initiatives	**Agree**	**Disagree**
		Freq/percent	Freq/percent
7	Skills acquired through vocational training has made me self-employed	423 (58.1)	305 (41.9)
8	Skills acquired through vocational skills training has made me self-reliant	380 (52.2)	348 (47.8)
9	I have been exposed to employment opportunities through vocational-based training programmes	375 (51.5)	353 (48.5)
10	Vocationally skill training programmes has improved my work knowledge thereby increasing my earning power	389 (53.4)	339 (46.6)
11	I can easily cater for my needs through the application of skills learned	417 (57.3)	311 (42.7)
12	Vocational skill training programmes has improved my self-esteem as I no longer depend on anyone for survival	423 (58.1)	305 (41.9)

The descriptive analysis in Table 2 highlights the extent to which vocational training has contributed to self-employment, financial independence, and overall economic empowerment within the community. The provision of community vocational skills training initiatives in Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State has played a significant role in advancing the goals of poverty reduction (SDG 1) and zero hunger (SDG 2).

A considerable proportion of respondents (58.1%) agreed that the skills they acquired through vocational training have enabled them to become self-employed. Similarly, 57.3% stated that they can now cater to their needs using the skills they have learned. These findings suggest that vocational training has had a positive impact on economic self-sufficiency, equipping individuals with the ability to generate income and reduce their dependency on external support. This aligns directly with the objectives of SDG 1, which aims to eradicate poverty by fostering economic opportunities.

In addition to promoting self-employment, vocational training has also contributed to self-reliance and financial empowerment. More than half of the respondents (52.2%) agreed that vocational skills training has made them self-reliant, while 53.4% indicated that their work knowledge has improved, leading to increased earning potential. Furthermore, 58.1% of the participants reported that their self-esteem has improved because they no longer rely on others for survival. These responses emphasize the role of vocational training in boosting confidence, resilience, and economic stability, further reinforcing its contribution to poverty alleviation.

Vocational training has also exposed individuals to employment opportunities, with 51.5% of respondents acknowledging that such programs have connected them to job prospects. However, nearly half (48.5%) disagreed with this assertion, suggesting that while vocational training provides skills, challenges such as job availability, access to capital, or market saturation may hinder its full impact.

Despite the positive outcomes, a significant percentage of respondents (ranging from 40% to 48%) expressed skepticism about the effectiveness of vocational training in securing employment and improving financial stability. This indicates that although vocational skills training is beneficial, there may be barriers preventing some individuals from fully utilizing their

acquired skills. These barriers could include a lack of startup capital, limited access to business support, or insufficient alignment between training programs and market demands.

To enhance the impact of vocational training initiatives, additional efforts are needed. Strengthening the transition from training to employment through job placement programs, mentorship opportunities, and financial support can help bridge the gap for those who struggle to find economic stability. Moreover, ensuring that vocational programs align with current market needs will increase the chances of employment and entrepreneurship success.

In sum, vocational skills training has proven to be an essential tool for poverty alleviation and economic empowerment in Ikot Ekpene senatorial district. While the initiatives have positively impacted many individuals, addressing the existing challenges will be crucial in ensuring that a greater number of people benefit from these programs. By improving access to resources and enhancing employment linkages, vocational training can play an even more significant role in achieving the objectives of SDG 1 and SDG 2.

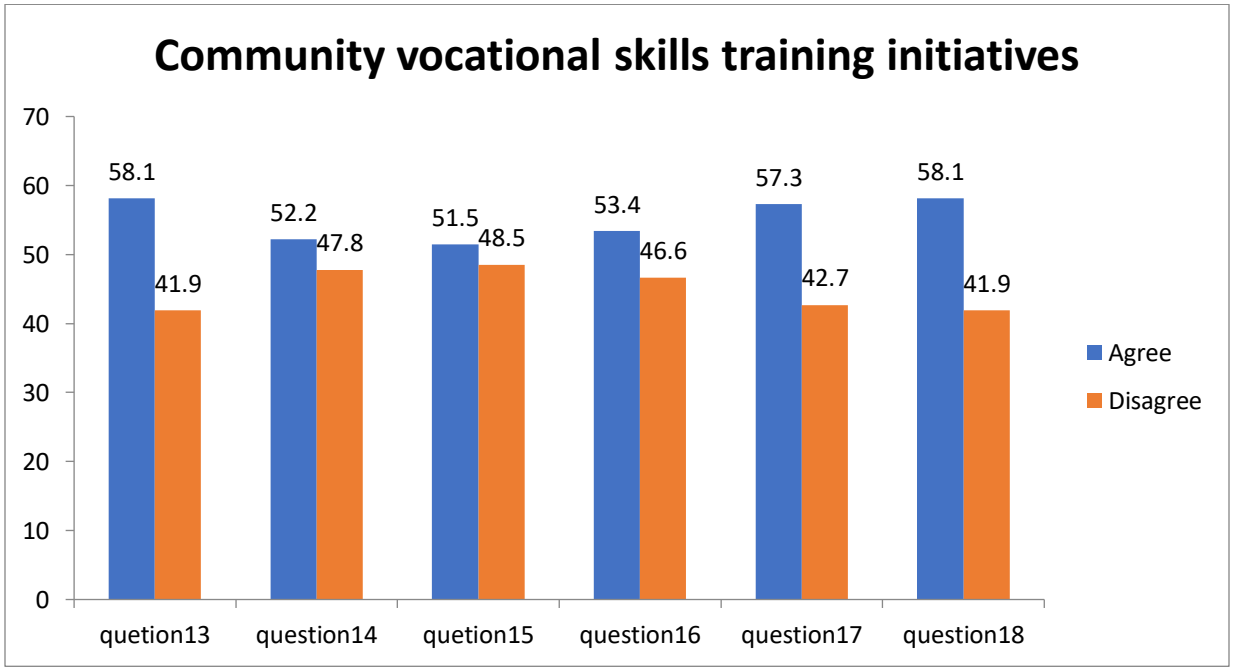

Figure 2: Bar chart showing responses regarding provision of community road network initiatives on the attainment of SDG 1 and 2 (no poverty and zero hunger) in Ikot Ekpene senatorial district of Akwa Ibom State

Discussion of findings

The findings reveal that community road network initiatives are perceived by the majority of respondents as positively impacting business activities, agricultural trade, employment opportunities, market access, agricultural productivity, and overall economic development in the Ikot Ekpene senatorial district. This aligns with existing literature that emphasizes the critical role of road infrastructure in fostering economic growth and reducing poverty. For instance, studies from (Olorunfemi, 2018) have shown that road infrastructure plays a significant role in the development and sustainability of rural environments, knowing fully that the rural areas are the hub for food production and centre for the production of raw material needed in the industries. Again, World Bank, (2019) reports have shown that improved road networks enhance market access for farmers, reduce transportation costs, and increase agricultural productivity, which are essential for achieving SDG 2 (Zero Hunger). Similarly, IFPRI, (2020) report also shows that better road infrastructure facilitates trade and business activities, creating employment opportunities and stimulating local economies, thereby contributing to SDG 1 (No Poverty). Moreover, finding from this study agrees with Aginde (2021) who conducted a study on rural road network and socio-economic development of rural farmers in Ika North Local Government Area of Delta, and found that there is a positive relationship between rural road network and socio-economic development of rural farmers in Ika North Local Government Area of Delta State. The study further revealed that improved rural roads drive sustainable rural development and national growth.

The findings from the study on vocational skills training in Ikot Ekpene senatorial district highlight its critical role in poverty alleviation and economic empowerment, aligning with global efforts to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1 (No Poverty) and 2 (Zero Hunger). This conclusion is consistent with broader research that underscores the transformative potential of vocational training in addressing poverty and unemployment, particularly in developing regions. For instance, a study by UNESCO (2019) emphasized that vocational education and training (VET) programs are instrumental in equipping individuals with employable skills, thereby reducing poverty and fostering economic growth. Similarly, the World Bank (2019) reported that vocational training initiatives in sub-Saharan Africa have significantly improved income levels and livelihood opportunities for participants, particularly in rural and underserved communities. These findings resonate with the outcomes observed in Ikot Ekpene, where vocational training has empowered individuals to secure sustainable livelihoods. However, the study also identifies challenges such as limited access to resources and weak employment linkages, which hinder the full potential of these programs. This aligns with findings by Okeke et al (2020), who noted that inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, and insufficient market connections often limit the effectiveness of vocational training initiatives in Nigeria. Addressing these barriers is crucial for scaling the impact of such programs, as emphasized by the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2021), which advocates for stronger public-private partnerships and improved access to training resources to enhance the reach and quality of vocational education.

Conclusion/recommendations

Based on the findings, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. The implementation of community road network initiatives significantly enhances economic activities by improving business operations, facilitating agricultural trade,

creating employment opportunities, and boosting overall productivity in the Ikot Ekpene senatorial district. Improved infrastructure plays a crucial role in fostering sustainable economic growth.

2. Skills acquisition programs have been instrumental in poverty reduction and economic empowerment, equipping individuals with practical skills for self-sufficiency and employment. Expanding such training programs can further enhance economic stability and financial independence in the district.

Based on the findings, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. The government should prioritize the construction and maintenance of roads to enhance transportation, facilitate trade, and boost agricultural productivity. Better road networks will improve market access and create more economic opportunities.
2. More vocational training centers should be established to equip individuals with relevant skills for employment and entrepreneurship. Public-private partnerships can help provide funding and technical support.

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