

Title

Challenges to sustainability in development programmes in Africa: Importance of indigenous methods and principles

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Abstract

Due to many challenges, sustainability in contemporary African development programmes has yet to be achieved. Specifically, this study sought to find out the meaning of sustainability in development programmes in the study area, find out the challenges to sustainability in Nigerian development programmes, and suggest more effective strategies that could enhance sustainability in Nigerian development programmes. The study purposively included 22 participants, and unstructured interviews were employed to collect data. The data were thematically analysed. Findings revealed that the challenges to sustainability in African development programmes include low level of participation, lack of integration of Indigenous methods and principles, involvement of non-social work graduates, proliferation of individuals as Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs), lack of technical know-how, poor remuneration, lack of means of transportation, inadequate funding, and ineffective transparency and accountability measures. The findings suggest integrating and applying the African Indigenous knowledge of social work into social work education and practice for sustainability in African development programmes.

Key words

Africa, communal approach, community participation, development programmes, Indigenous methods and principles, Nigeria, sustainable development

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Introduction

The localization of Sustainability is improving and maintaining healthy socio-economic and ecological systems for holistic human development, and it is central to social work. ‘Social work’ was informal in pre-colonial African societies, where various methods, theories, and principles of the development process were applied to attain sustainability in development programmes. In the 19th and 20th centuries, instead of strengthening the African support systems and development process, the colonialists introduced Westernised social work to ameliorate the problems brought about by colonisation. Westernised social work continues in post-colonial Africa at the detriment of sustainability in development programmes. This article covers sustainability in African development programmes, challenges to sustainability in African development programmes, African communal approach for sustainability in development programmes, methods and materials, ethical approval, results, discussion, implications for development, limitations of the study, and conclusion.

Sustainability in African development programmes

In African societies, ‘social work practice’ pre-dated colonialism, which formalised social work to alleviate the social problems it caused. Chitereka (2009) and Kreitzer et al. (2009) argued that all cultures, including African societies, practised ‘social work’ because they had inclusive and sustainable Indigenous care methods of developing the communities, protecting and caring for the vulnerable. The African Union in the year 2013 signed the Agenda 2063 for inclusive and sustainable development in the continent (African Union (AU), 2013), imitating the international declarations on the importance of inclusiveness for sustainability in development programmes which Africa practised in time immemorial. For instance, in African societies, Rankopo et al. (2021) opined that the extended family system was the first point of contact to cushion individuals who encountered diverse life crises such as hunger, sickness, disability, death, old age, and injuries. The family members were expected to discharge their culturally accepted role to support people in need in their extended family (Rankopo et al., 2021). In the Somalian societies, Eno et al. (2022) argued that the cultural practice, tradition, and customary institutions, such as the immediate family, extended family, and community members, contributed to the well-being of individuals, families, and groups in need-based on a long history of social cohesiveness.

In Indigenous Zimbabwean contexts, social work roles were diffused in the community (Mugumbate

& Bohwasi, 2021); the critical providers of social services were the immediate family (parents and siblings), near-immediate family (*Vatete* - father’s sister, *Sekuru* - mother’s brother), and extended family or clan structures such as *Sahwira* (a very close family friend, community leaders, and well-wishers). The Ubuntu practice of having *Zunde ra Mambo* (Chief’s Granary) ensured that vulnerable groups, such as older adults, orphans, and widows, were provided for (Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013). Similarly, Twikirize and Spitzer (2022) revealed that in Burundian societies, there was an *ofikibiri* concept (working together) and *abashingantahe* (a judicial council), providing community-based mechanisms for tackling social problems.

Furthermore, in Kenyan societies, support methods were based on *harambee* (pulling together), which enhanced self-help efforts to assist one another in agricultural activities (Twikirize & Spitzer, 2022). The ‘pulling together’ was also used to execute communal projects such as constructing houses, health facilities, roads, and open wells. Other cultural methods of mutual support in Kenyan societies included the *vyama*, which refers to associations formed to assist those with low incomes and vulnerable community members; the *ubudehe*, which refers to a participatory practice of problem-solving in the communities; *umuganda* (communal work), and *umugorabaw’ababyeyi* referring to parents’ evening meetings for social cohesion and socio-economic well-being of all community members (Twikirize & Spitzer, 2022). In pre-colonial Botswana societies, Rankopo et al. (2021) reported that extended family members cared for orphans and vulnerable children, people with disabilities, the sick, and the elderly. Fostering vulnerable children by their relatives was commonly practised; there were no homeless children, and relatives offered children to barren couples to adopt as their own (*go tsalelwa*).

Twikirize and Spitzer (2022) revealed that in pre-colonial Tanzanian societies, a variety of communal practices and self-help initiatives existed in different communities utilising the *chagga* (communal efforts) and the *saigha*, which refers to an association for assisting members in both farming and pastoral activities in the communities. Another common cultural practice was the UPATU, an informal saving and money-lending scheme used among women groups to assist members who required financial aid. In Ugandan pre-colonial societies, Twikirize and Spitzer (2022) also identified approaches, including a fostering system that catered to orphans, to household cluster methods known as *akabondo* and *bataka* groups (mutual aid groups) were mechanisms for poverty reduction among the community members.

Furthermore, in pre-colonial Malawi, social welfare services were offered through religious organisations and other structures (Kakowa, 2016). Similarly, Avedal (2011) argued that caring for the vulnerable was the function of community and religious leaders, family heads, extended family members, and chiefs in pre-colonial Ghana. Wairire (2014) stressed that household heads and village elders voluntarily assisted people in need in pre-colonial Kenya. The RIKAs (heads and mentors of age groups) guided individuals and groups to attain their life aspirations, while the youth reciprocated by providing for the elders' needs (Wairire, 2014). In pre-colonial Zimbabwe, care and protection were provided by the communities and leaders through ZUNDE RAMAMBO (the chief's granary), upholding UBUNTU values (Mugumbate & Bohwasi, 2021). In pre-colonial Somalia, Eno et al. (2022) opined that the nuclear family, extended family-based work, tribal group work, kin-based work, and communal work were for the well-being of the collective. In Nigerian pre-colonial societies, Okoye (2013) and Udeani (2019) argued that 'social work' focused on communal, kinship, family, and marriage systems to succour the destitute, low-income, and mentally ill. In addition, all community members met together to prioritise their needs based on a unanimous opinion and voluntarily executed development programmes that were decided on utilising personal and communal efforts for the prosperity of the collective (Ramsey-Soroghayeh, 2021; Veta, 2012).

'Social work practice' was informal, guided by principles of collectivism and togetherness, and was based on blood ties (Ekpe, 1983; Ramsey-Soroghayeh, 2021); no official agencies provided for the vulnerable as a person's position in the African kinship determined tasks, obligations, and acceptable authorities for promoting the safeguarding of the vulnerable (Chitereka, 2009; Wairire, 2014). 'Social work education' in pre-colonial Africa entailed the socialisation of community members, or relatives, into practices of mutual aid and communal activities through participation and adherence to the principles of social cohesion for the welfare of the collective. In the 19th and 20th centuries, formal social work was brought to Africa by the colonialists. Instead of strengthening the African support systems, the colonialists introduced Westernised social work to ameliorate the problems brought about by colonialisation (Avedal, 2011).

Post-colonial development efforts are similar to those of the colonial period. In contemporary Africa, the role of social work is recognised, but the adoption of Western theories and methods, which are incompatible with African contexts, creates a vacuum in the sustainability of development programs (Onyekwere, 2016; Spitzer & Twikirize,

2014), making many development programmes in Africa 'white elephants' (Kinyata & Abiodun, 2020).

Challenges to sustainability in African development programmes

There are many challenges to sustainability in African development programmes, particularly in Nigeria. These challenges include defective planning, lack of coordination between government departments, scarcity of financial resources, and lack of participation of the target communities (Khwaja, 2009; Panda, 2007). Naku et al. (2021) argued that if development agencies do not acknowledge shared values, norms, people's attitudes, skills, capacity, beliefs, awareness, gender, and ethnicity in the development process, sustainability in development programmes is unattainable. Despite this, aid support from development agencies often needs to fully understand and consider socio-economic, cultural, and political factors influencing the project design, planning, and implementation (Oino et al., 2015), and this has led to sustainability failures in African development programmes. The effect is that once donor funding and support structures withdraw from such development programmes, they become stalled due to inadequate funds, the absence of beneficiaries' support, and the lack of technical know-how needed to run them (Varmzyary & Hosseini, 2010). Ejumudo (2015) revealed that in Africa, policy gaps and disconnects, as well as the ensuing action dilemma, have the potency of constraining the actualisation of sustainability in development efforts with the possibility of an environmental crisis. Systemic corruption, lack of stakeholders' participation, inadequate information, ineffective development policies, low transparency and accountability measures (Odo, 2014; Wawira & Were, 2019), and over-dependency on foreign aid have significant challenges to sustainability in African development programmes (Kinyata & Abiodun, 2020). Thus, development agencies need to establish internal systems, structure, and work culture that promote strong leadership and positive organisational image, foster the belief that people are willing to support products and services they find valuable and facilitate the development plans for sustainability in development programmes (Adam & Omer, 2015).

Furthermore, Masombe and Omwenga (2020) argued that severe discussions of sustainability in development programmes require considerations of the dynamics of complex cultural arrangements in particular places rather than assumptions of either peoples or their ecological contexts, and fundamental debates on sustainability must consider environmental and cultural preservation with active practices of living in culturally constituted places.

Otherwise, sustainability is unachievable, as scholars noted that modifiable programmes adaptable to indigenous conditions are more likely to be sustained (Bopp et al., 2013; Hailemariam et al., 2019). Therefore, sustainable programme design must utilise essential aspects of cultural identity to synthesise the past with the present to benefit the future (Masombe & Omwenga, 2020). As such, development agencies must understand and consider socio-economic, cultural, and political factors influencing the development process for sustainability in African development programmes (Oino et al., 2015).

African communal approach for sustainability in development programmes

Africans live a life of togetherness and their cultures promote the 'we feeling,' which is the force that binds individuals, groups, and communities in unison. The 'we feeling' brings about communalism - interconnectedness, dependence, solidarity, and relationships among human beings (Graness, 2018). Communalism is global, but it has to do with blood ties and ancestral relationships in Africa, making it more robust than other continents. The African communalistic system operates by the principles of egalitarianism and consensual democracy; the precedence of the community overrides the individual's (Gyekye, 1987; Wiredu, 2007). The African communal approach to development programmes depicts interpersonal relationships, mutual dependencies (Agada & Egbai, 2018; Graness, 2018), and community structure that guarantees belongingness for all (Agada & Egbai, 2018; Chimakonam, 2018; Gyekye, 1987; Menkiti, 1984; Metz, 2011) based on the principle of 'I am because we are, and since we are, I am' (Mbiti, 1969).

The African communal approach and the principles of togetherness and collectivism create an enabling environment for all and sundry to participate actively without coercion in the decision-making process and execution of development programmes in pre-colonial African societies (Etta et al., 2016; Izuagie & Sado, 2015; Oluwagbemi-Jacob, 2014; Ramsey-Soroghay, 2021). The executed programmes were regarded as communally owned for the benefit of all (Etta et al., 2016), and they were sustainable. Cardinal to the principles of togetherness and collectivism were the virtues of group solidarity, commitment, hospitality, patriotism, and active participation in development programmes (Oluwagbemi-Jacob, 2014). Therefore, to ensure active participation in development programmes for sustainability, there is a need to contextualise it within the existing contexts (Mubita et al., 2017) because there is no single method for its promotion; instead, different countries need to apply different methods reflecting their socio-cultural

contexts (Davids, 2009). Several studies have covered socio-cultural factors influencing sustainability in development programmes in Africa (Adam & Omer, 2015; Adeyemo & Kayode, 2014; Ejumudo, 2015; Ekanem & Nwachukwu, 2013; Naku et al., 2021; Oino et al., 2015; Thomas & Maitho, 2021). Little or none has been done on challenges to sustainability and discussed the importance of Indigenous methods and principles to African development programmes in the available literature. Therefore, this study explores challenges to sustainability in African development programmes regarding Nigerian contexts and discusses the importance of Indigenous methods and principles for sustainable development. Specifically, this study seeks to: (a) Find out the meaning of sustainability in development programmes in the study area. (b) Find out the challenges to sustainability in Nigerian development programmes. (c) Suggest more effective strategies that could enhance sustainability in Nigerian development programmes.

Methodology

Study area

This study covered Delta State, Nigeria, which has, among others, the Department of Community Development under the Ministry of Women Affairs, Community and Social Development, Asaba, with Area Offices across the state. The department is mostly staffed with nonsocial work graduates. They are responsible for providing community development programmes across the three Senatorial Districts in the state, namely Delta Central, Delta South, and Delta North. The state mainly comprises rural communities characterised by a communalistic living system, and they face various sustainability challenges in development programmes implemented by development agencies in the state. Public and private tertiary institutions in the study area still need to provide social work programmes. In addition, the study covered the University of Ilorin, which is located in Kwara State, Nigeria, to enable the contributions of social work educators to this study.

Study design

The study utilised a phenomenological qualitative research design to explore and describe participants' experiences about the salient issues of this study. This design allowed the participants to express themselves freely, using their terminologies to explain, describe, and interpret the phenomenon under investigation based on their experiences (Neubauer et al., 2019).

Sampling procedure

The study purposively selected six CDOs from each of the Senatorial Districts of Delta State and four social work educators from the Department of Social Work, University of Ilorin, Nigeria, for in-depth interviews. The CDOs could participate in the study if they had worked with the community development department for three years or more. The study covered the three Senatorial Districts because they possessed the needed characteristics of the phenomenon under study and for adequate coverage. The criteria for selecting the social work educator were that they had been teaching social work courses for three years or more and had a postgraduate education in social work. This study considered the duration of service of the participants essential to enable the collection of rich and valuable information. The total sample size for this study was 22. This sample size was sufficient for this research because the reliability of exploratory research is more on the selected knowledgeable participants than the number (Saunders et al., 2018; Vasileiou et al., 2018). In addition, Abayomi (2017) argued that a sample size between two and 25 is sufficient for exploratory research.

Data collection

The study used unstructured interviews for the data collection. The unstructured interviews assisted in collecting rich and detailed data as participants were allowed to express themselves without barriers. Open-ended questions and probes were employed. The interview sessions were conducted face-to-face in the participants' offices until saturation. The researcher remained neutral during the interview sessions while facilitating a rich, detailed, and reflective account of participants' experiences and views (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). The study posed the question of the meaning of sustainability to only the CDOs to ensure that they understood the concept as used in programme development. In contrast, the study posed other questions to all the participants. Each interview lasted for approximately 35 to 45 minutes. To ensure adequate coverage and retention of the data gathered, the researcher took field notes and tape-recorded the interviews (Lofland & Lofland, 1999) with the participants' permission.

Data analysis

Thematic data analysis was utilised to identify and interpret patterns or themes in this study (Boyatzis, 1998). The data analysis started with identifying and noting the keywords commonly used by the participants to describe the phenomenon under study during the interview sessions (Burgess et al., 2021). Thereafter, data immersion commenced by repeatedly playing back the audiotapes and carefully studying the field notes for familiarisation and transcription into English. The researcher compared

the transcribed data with the audiotaped discussions and field notes to ensure that the reporting patterns in the data set were identified correctly and interpreted for inherent meaning (Kalof et al., 2008; Lieberberg et al., 2020). Keywords and quotations were selected, coded, and categorized and the researcher identified the coded categories, interpreted and assigned them to themes relevant to the research objectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006) without contrary cases. The researcher avoided his preconceptions interfering with the identified themes by critically reflecting upon his beliefs, values, and assumptions throughout the research process (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). The initial themes were further clustered, and succinct phrases were assigned to describe each theme's meaning (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

Ethical approval

The University of Ilorin Ethical Review Committee ethically approved this project with the number UERC/ASN/2023/2737. The researcher notified the participants that they could withdraw from the exercise and have their data deleted at any point if they were willing. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed; they provided informed consent to participate in the study.

Results

Three themes emerged which are the concept of sustainability in Nigerian development programmes, challenges to sustainability in Nigerian development programmes, and strategies for more effective sustainability in Nigerian development programmes. The analysis was on the three themes. The participants are anonymised, SWE refers to social work educator, and CDO represents community development officer. Topical contextual expressions and connotations, used by the participants to portray the phenomenon under study, were pulled out from the thematic clusters and used as quotes to buttress the results.

The concept of sustainability in African development programmes

In this section, the CDOs explain the concept of 'sustainability' in development programmes. The study showed that the CDOs understood the concept to a great extent, though they gave different descriptions of it. The basics of the term: 'the ability of a development programme(s) to provide services continuously to target users and their capability to maintain it for continuous provision of services to their next generations' were made clear. Some examples of their topical expressions are: 'sustainability in development programmes refers to completed projects that can be maintained to provide

the needed benefits to the present beneficiary community members and others in the future' (CDO2).

Sustainability in development programmes refers to a project's ability to continuously supply the needed services to the beneficiaries, even the unborn generations. It depends on the beneficiaries' capabilities to maintain the programme (CDO7).

Sustainability is the continuous reaping of the needed services from a development programme, be it governmental or non-governmental, for a long time by the target users, and it has to be handed over to the next generations to benefit from it as well (CDO13).

Challenges to sustainability in Nigerian development programmes

In this section, most participants indicated that the development programmes needed more sustainability in the study area. According to the participants, most of the programmes executed by the Nigerian government in the communities were abandoned halfway. The participants who indicated that the development programmes were not sustainable attributed the challenges to lack of integration and application of Indigenous knowledge of social work, inadequate community participation, involvement of nonsocial work graduates in social development agencies, and inadequate funding.

Others attributed the challenges to sustainability in the development programmes to the proliferation of individuals acting as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) for profit making, low level of community participation, insufficient information, lack of technical know-how, poor remuneration, ineffective transparency and accountability measures, and lack of means of transportation. The study also revealed that a few programmes, such as schools and health centres, were sustainable because the communities utilised them, but they needed to be better staffed and adequately equipped. Examples of their expressions are:

Most Nigerian development programmes are not sustainable due to the lack of application of Indigenous knowledge/methods and principles that are familiar to our people in the development process, the exclusion of the marginalised, political interference, lack of interest, male dominance, and engagement of nonsocial work graduates in social development agencies (SWE3).

The challenges to sustainability in Nigerian development programmes include inadequate funding, poor programme design, registered individual contractors as NGOs, profit-making,

inadequate professionally qualified social workers, a lack of maintenance culture, insufficient information, poor remuneration, a lack of vehicles, poor programme monitoring, and a lack of technical know-how (CDO11).

The significant challenges to sustainability in Nigerian development programmes include inappropriate emphasis and application of Westernised knowledge in the problem-solving process to the detriment of our Indigenous knowledge and principles of social work in the development process. These have created incompatibility in our practice contexts and resulted in unsustainable outcomes. For instance, the profound role of the extended family and other community structures that enhance active community participation in resolving culturally sensitive cases, such as inheritance issues, marriage issues, and providing succour to people in need have been neglected for the principle of individualism instead of the principle of collectivism known to our people (Nigerians) for adequate participation and sustainability in development programmes (SWE2).

The challenges include a lack of integration and acceptance of effective Indigenous knowledge of social work into the African social work curricula for the development of student social workers (SSWs), inappropriate emphasis on Westernised knowledge in social work education and practice in Africa including Nigeria, and inadequate participation of target beneficiaries in the development process due to mobilisation methods that are incompatible with the Nigerian contexts (CDO6).

Strategies for more effective sustainability in Nigerian development programmes

In this section, most participants suggested that integrating and applying Indigenous knowledge of social work in the development process would mitigate challenges to sustainability in Nigerian development programmes. The participants also felt that African social work educators need to research African Indigenous knowledge of social work and adequately disseminate the outcomes in Africa and beyond to inform global social work practice. Other strategies suggested including adequate funding, providing sufficient information to beneficiaries, providing transparency and accountability measures, deregistering of unqualified NGOs, engaging professionally qualified social workers, providing means of transportation, adequate remuneration, capacity building of beneficiaries, and strengthening the African support systems.

Examples of their topical expressions:

Integrating the African Indigenous knowledge of social work, such as the communal approach and the principles of collectivism and togetherness, into social work education and practice would enhance active community participation. The Nigerian government needs to prioritise strengthening the African support systems. In addition, nonsocial work graduates in development agencies should undergo in-service training to sanitise the development process for programmes' sustainability in Nigeria (SWE1).

The Nigerian government and development agencies should formulate policies for applying Indigenous knowledge and principles that our people are familiar with in the development process. Target communities should be capacitated, adequate funds should be provided, and transparency and accountability measures should be implemented. 'Non-Governmental Individuals (NGIs)' that are for-profits acting as NGOs should be deregistered (CDO4).

Commenting further on the strategies for effective sustainability in Nigerian development programmes, one of the participants, SWE2, stressed:

There is an urgent need for African social work educators to research African Indigenous knowledge of social work and disseminate the outcomes to social work stakeholders in Africa and beyond to inform global social work practice. This would help Indigenising social work and resolving culturally sensitive cases for sustainability in development programmes in Africa.

For us, some of the strategies for sustainability in Nigerian development programmes include engaging professionally qualified social workers in social work institutions and social development agencies and providing adequate information about development programmes. There is a need for the training of beneficiaries on their roles in development matters; programmes should be culturally specific or reflect the socio-cultural contexts of target users. In addition, adopting the African principles of collectivism and togetherness would ensure cohesion, inclusion of all beneficiaries, particularly the marginalised, in the development process, and proper monitoring of development programmes for sustainable development (CDO6).

Discussion

This study found that the CDO participants understood the concept of sustainability, which is very relevant to development programmes. The basics of the term: 'the ability of a development programmes to provide services continuously to target users and their capability to maintain it for

their next generations to benefit from it' were made clear.

This study also revealed several challenges facing sustainability in Nigerian development programmes. During the interviews, the majority of the participants indicated that the lack of effective integration and application of Indigenous knowledge of social work and the involvement of nonsocial work graduates in social development agencies are significant challenges to achieving sustainability in Nigerian development programmes. Similarly, Naku et al. (2021) found that lack of recognition of shared values, norms, people's attitudes, skills, capacity, beliefs, awareness, gender, and ethnicity by development agencies in the development process negated sustainability in development programmes in Tanzania. In addition, sustainable programme design must utilise essential aspects of cultural identity to synthesise the past with the present to benefit future generations (Masombe & Omwenga, 2020). Hailemariam et al. (2019) also revealed that modifiable programs adaptable to Indigenous conditions are more likely to be sustained.

This study identified other challenges to sustainability in Nigerian development programmes, including a low level of community participation, the proliferation of individuals acting as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) for profit making, inadequate funding, a lack of technical know-how, poor remuneration, ineffective transparency and accountability measures, and inadequate means of transportation. Similarly, studies have shown that systemic corruption, lack of stakeholders' participation, insufficient information, ineffective development policies, scarcity of financial resources, and low transparency and accountability measures posed challenges to sustainability in development programmes in Africa (Khwaja, 2009; Odo, 2014; Panda, 2007; Wawira & Were, 2019).

This study succinctly revealed that sustainability in Nigerian development programmes is faced with significant challenges. This study suggests that sustainability in Nigerian development programmes could be attained through implementation of effective strategies, including adequate funding, providing sufficient information to beneficiaries, providing transparency and accountability measures, deregistering of unqualified NGOs, engaging professionally qualified social workers, providing means of transportation, adequate remuneration, capacity building of beneficiaries, and strengthening of African support systems. Most importantly, this study proffers that integrating and applying Indigenous knowledge of social work in the development process would mitigate challenges to sustainability in Nigerian development

programmes. There is also the need for African social work educators to research African Indigenous knowledge of social work and adequately disseminate the outcomes in Africa and beyond to inform global social work practice. Finally, in collaboration with policymakers and social development agencies, professional social workers need to formulate social policies prioritising African Indigenous knowledge of social work for sustainability in Nigerian and African development programmes.

Implications for development

The findings of this study suggest that Nigerian social work educators, in collaboration with policymakers and social development agencies, should integrate African Indigenous knowledge of social work into social work education and practice. The integration would enhance the development of student social workers (SSWs) for competency and easier adoption by social work practitioners for sustainability in development programmes. In addition, there is also a need for African social work educators to research African Indigenous knowledge of social work and adequately disseminate the outcomes in Africa and beyond to inform global social work practice for sustainable development. Finally, in collaboration with policymakers and social development agencies, professional social workers must formulate social policies prioritising African Indigenous knowledge of social work for sustainability in Nigerian and African development programmes. The social work professional bodies in Nigeria and Africa should adequately regulate the profession to ensure ethics and competency in applying the African Indigenous knowledge of social work for sustainability in development programmes.

Limitations of the study

This study covered the views of social work educators at the University of Ilorin and CDOs in Delta State, Nigeria. To generalise the findings of this research, more encompassing work covering more states in Nigeria and other African countries with more participants is needed. Nonetheless, this study resonated with other studies conducted across the African continent. It recommends integrating the African Indigenous knowledge of social work into social work education and practice for sustainability in development programmes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study explored challenges to sustainability in African development programmes in Nigerian contexts and discussed the importance of Indigenous methods and principles for sustainable development. The study utilised a phenomenological qualitative research design. The

researcher purposively included four social work educators and 18 CDOs for this study. The study employed unstructured interviews to collect the data, which were thematically analysed.

The findings revealed that the CDO participants understood the concept of sustainability in development programmes. However, the majority of the participants identified various challenges to sustainability in Nigerian development programmes. These challenges included a low level of community participation, the proliferation of individuals acting as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) for profit making, inadequate funding, lack of technical know-how, poor remuneration, ineffective transparency and accountability measures, and inadequate means of transportation. The participants also indicated that the lack of effective integration and application of Indigenous knowledge of social work and the involvement of nonsocial work graduates in social development agencies are significant challenges to achieving sustainability in Nigerian development programmes. Most importantly, this study proffers that integrating and applying Indigenous knowledge of social work in the development process would mitigate challenges to sustainability in Nigerian development programmes. There is also a need for professional social workers, in collaboration with policymakers and social development agencies, to formulate social policies and action plans prioritising African Indigenous knowledge of social work. The policies and action plans would address adequate funding, providing sufficient information to beneficiaries, providing transparency and accountability measures, deregistering of unqualified NGOs, engaging professionally qualified social workers, providing means of transportation, adequate remuneration, capacity building of beneficiaries, and strengthening African support systems. It would also enhance African social work educators to research African Indigenous knowledge of social work, and adequately disseminate the outcomes in Africa and beyond to inform global social work practice for sustainability in development programmes.

Declaration of conflict of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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