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## **INTRODUCTION**

Nigeria, which is popularly known as the “Giant of Africa”, is the most populous country in Africa. Back in 1960 when she declared her independence, the country recorded an estimated 45.2 million people. As at the time the population number were documented by the Nigeria National Bureau of Statistics in 2012, it was recorded that the population had grown to 166.2 million people (this constitutes a change of about 268% between the year 1960 and the year 2012 and about 2.35% of the entire earth's population). In 2016, Nigeria was estimated to have over 178.5 million people although United Nations projections have placed the population as high as 186 million.

Rivers state, which is known as the Garden city of the Nation has its capital as Port Harcourt, one of the top five largest cities in the country and an economically significant centre of Nigeria's oil industry. The state is made up of a total of 23 Local Government Areas (LGAs) with a total of 319 wards. The population statistics of the state as at the 2006 census was at 5.2 million while the Nigerian Population Statistics of 2016 has projected it to be at about 7.3 million. This ranks the state as the 6th most populous state in the country.

The “Electorate Awake and Participate Project Survey on Community Priority Needs in Rivers State” is designed to understudy and analyse the most pressing needs of the

people of the state, discover the possible steps that could be taken by the present government towards achieving these needs and strategies that can be adopted to ensure sustainable and inclusive ways of addressing these identified needs in the state.

This is well guided by the aim of ensuring that the present LGAs feel the impact of governance and reap the dividends of democracy they all voted for during the just concluded general elections held in February and March 2019. With existing project platforms created during the implementation of the Electorate Awake and Participate Project which spreads across the entire LGAs of the state, we were able use the EAPP structures created under the first phase of the project, who identified relevant and pressing needs using questionnaires and inputs to outline the different challenges facing Local Government Areas across the state.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This survey was administered by trained coordinators in the twenty-three (23) LGAs of the state. Putting into consideration the composition of wards across the 23 Local Government Areas, a community-based cross-sectional descriptive survey was adopted. The Media Awareness and Justice Initiative administered the questionnaires to a group consisting of 10 persons (5 women and 5 men) each from the 319 wards that



make up the 23 LGAs using a random sampling technique.

The individuals were administered with the survey questionnaire which was designed in a very simple way to ensure ease of answers as a result of differences in assimilation of various respondents.

The questionnaire consisted of different sections which collected information on demographic, socioeconomic status of the respondents as well as their view on the relevant priority issues for their LGA, immediate steps the state government needs to take in improving development in the state and structures which will contribute to ensuring sustainable and inclusive ways to address the issues of the LGA.

### KEY FINDINGS

The survey was targeted to cover and be

administered to a total of 3,190 individuals pulled from the 319 wards in the state, however, only 3080 responses were retrieved and used for the study.

### OCCUPATION OF RESPONDENTS

The result gathered from the responses showed that males constituted above half of the respondents (52.5%) while the females were represented by 29%. However, 18.5% of the respondents failed to indicate their gender. Amongst these respondents were; Students (22.4%), Entrepreneurs (20.8%), Farmers (6.2%), Employees (13.6%), Unemployed (18.5%), Housewives (3.9%) and Traditional leaders (4.9%) while the remaining 9.7% (30) did not tick any of the listed options.

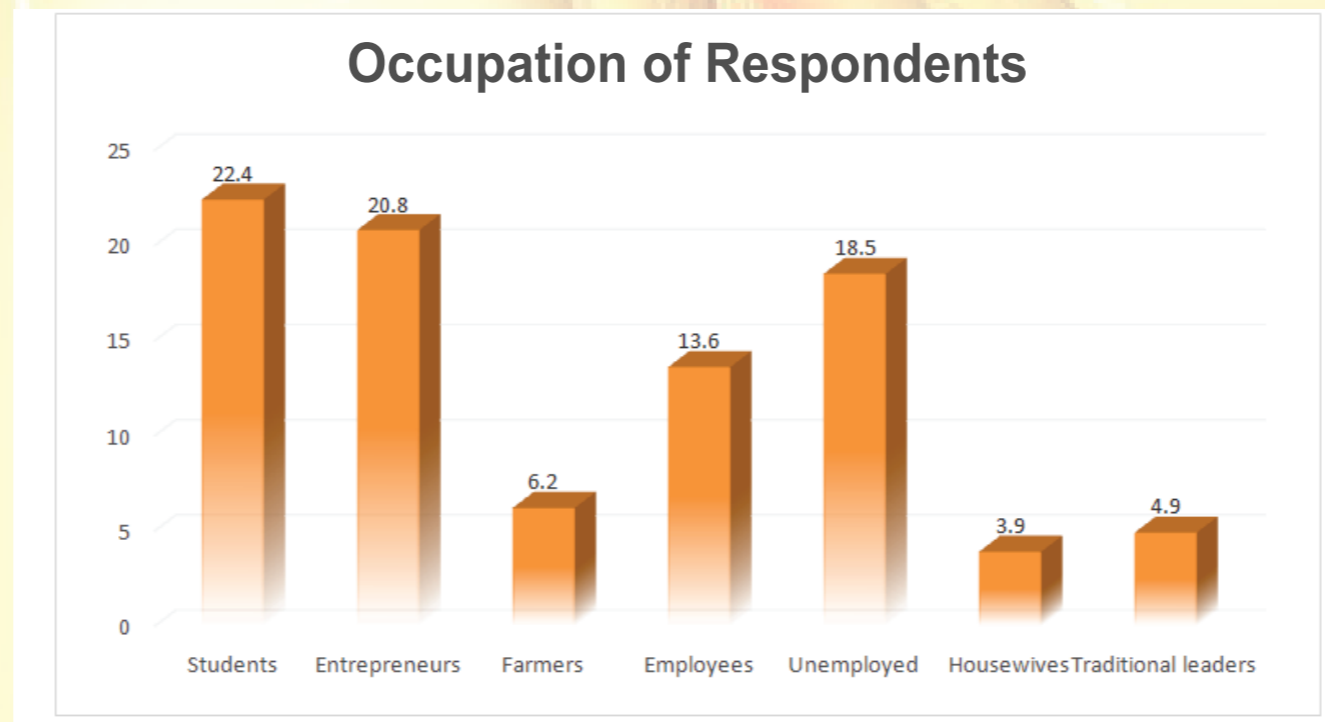


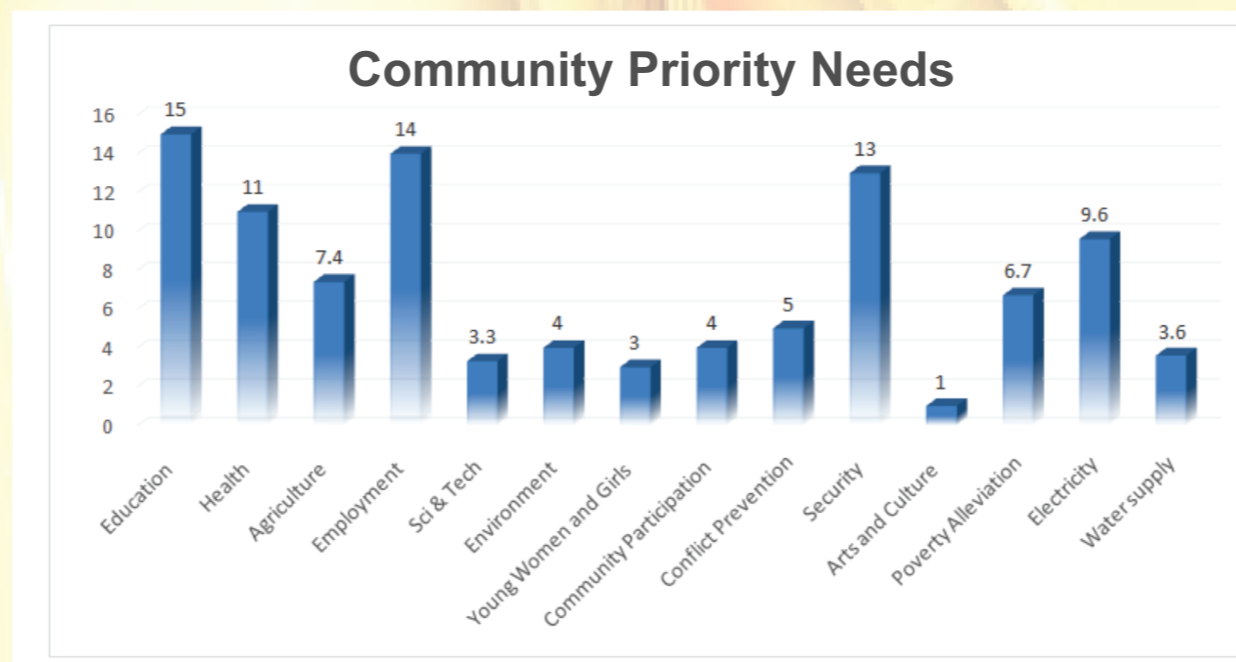
Figure 1: Chart showing the Occupational distribution of the respondents



Looking at the relevant priority issues for community people in Rivers state, majority of the respondents (15%) went for education, while 14% chose Employment, 13% went for Security and another 11% for healthcare.

The rest were distributed amongst issues concerning; Electricity (9.6%) agriculture (7.4%), Poverty alleviation (6.7%), Conflict prevention/Peace building (5%), Community participation in politics and policy making (4%), Environmental (4%), Portable water supply (3.6%), Science and technology (3.3%), Young women and girls (3%) and lastly, Arts and culture (1%).

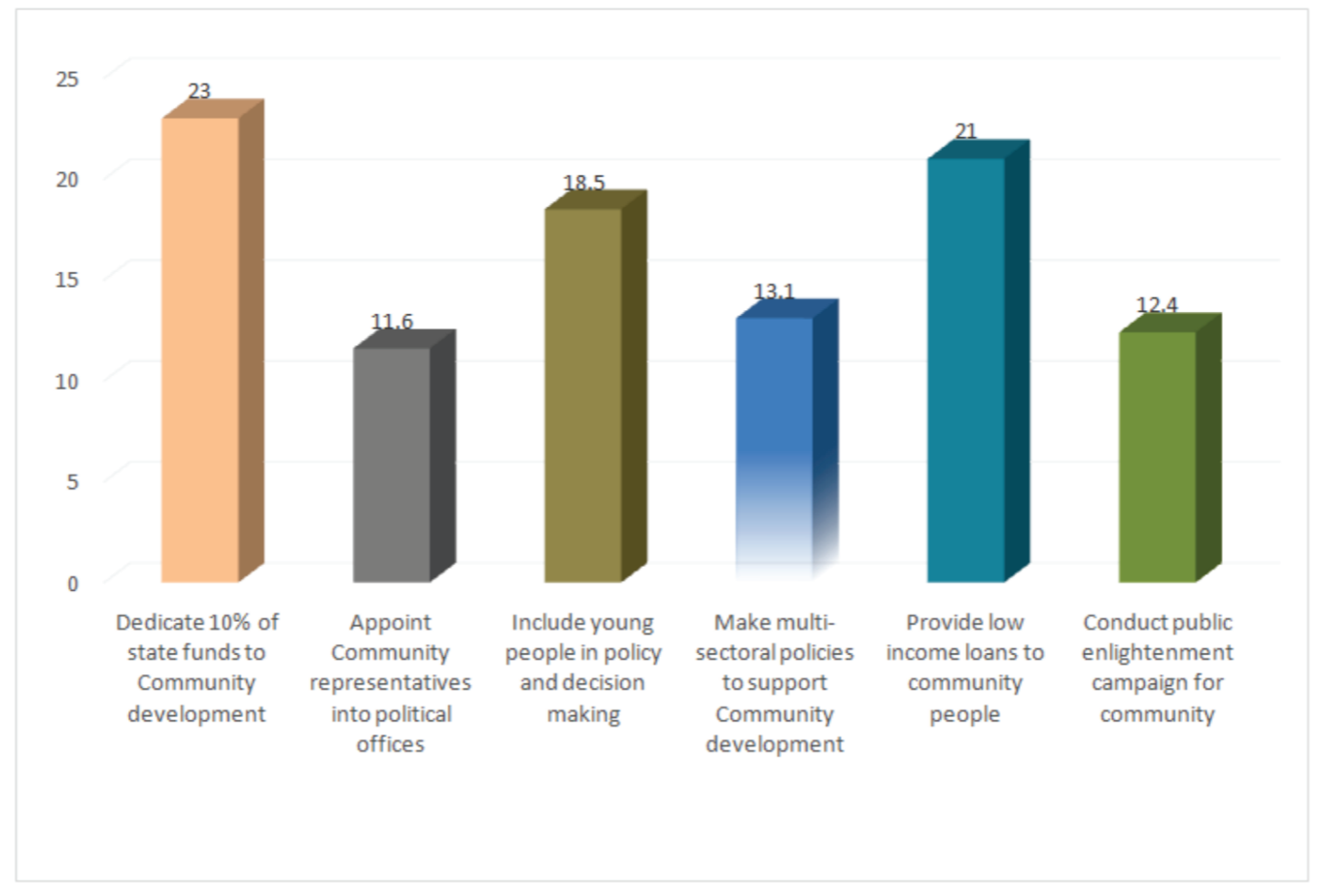
In response to the questions put forward to the respondents, on what they believe are immediate steps needed to be taken by the Rivers state government in improving development across the state, the reactions generated showed that; majority of the respondents (23%) wants the government to dedicate 10% of the state funds to Community development, while another 21% wants the government to provide low income loans to community people to start their businesses, and another 18.5% suggested that this could be achieved if the government can include young people in policy and decision making through regular consultations, interactions and town hall meetings.



**Figure 2:** Chart showing the needs of the Communities in Rivers state



The opinion of the rest of the respondents were somehow evenly distributed on issues concerning; the making of multi-sectoral policies to support community development in the state (13.1%), conducting public enlightenment campaign for community people for self-sufficiency (12.4%) and appointing community representatives into political offices in the state (11.6%).



**Figure 3:** Chart showing the immediate states necessary for the government to ensure community development

When asked on what structures will contribute to ensuring sustainable and inclusive ways to address the community development issues in the state, the response generated from the respondents reached indicates that; close to half (45.4%) were of the opinion that that elected leaders should sign a community agenda developed in collaboration with communities with strong guarantee to implement it.



The rest of the respondents were divided between two options;

- I. Elected leader should constitute community based interactive groups to ensure project delivery (29.2%), or
- II. The elected leaders should provide a well thought out Community development programme with achievable timelines and Roadmaps (25.4%).

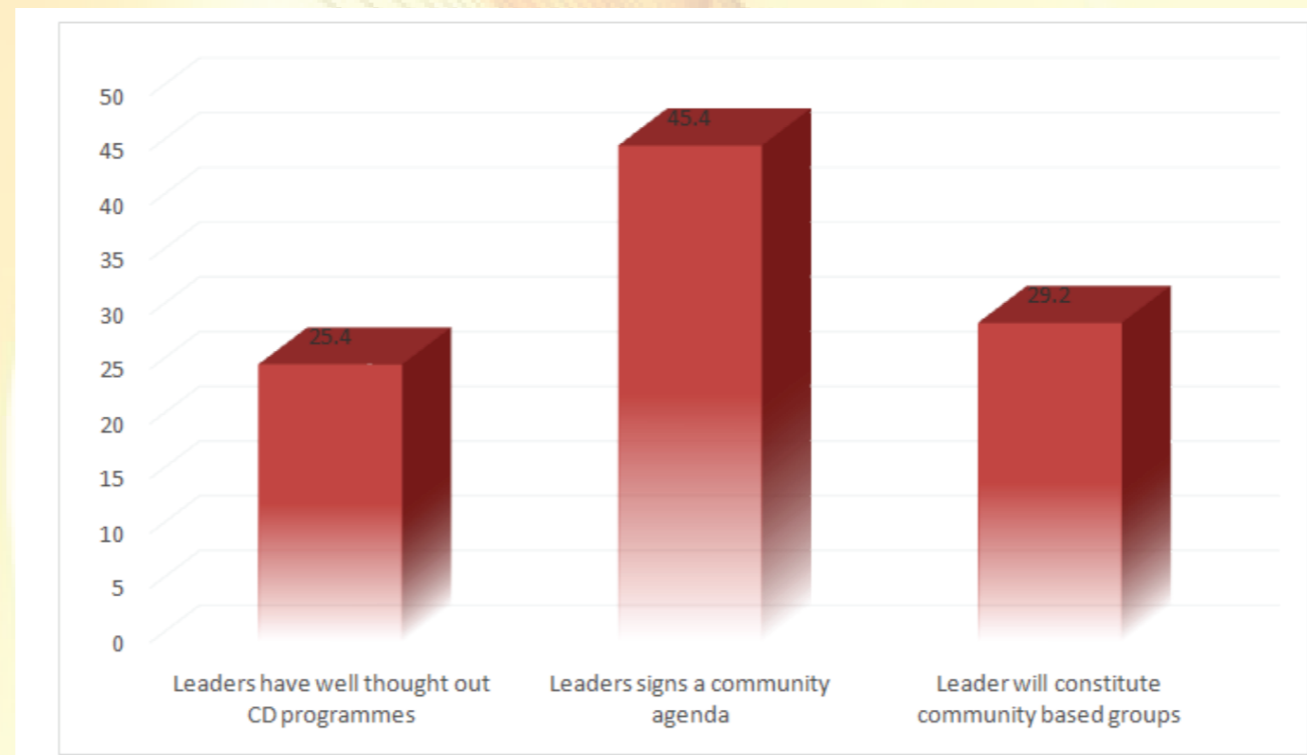


Figure 4: Chart showing the structures that will ensure community development issues are addressed in the state



### CHALLENGES

1. The insecurity in the state, hindered accessibility to some of the political wards in the state.
2. The distrust on political leaders from the community dwellers hindered the completion and return of some of the already distributed questionnaires.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

This survey analysed the needs of the communities in Rivers state, the immediate steps necessary for provision of such needs, and the structures necessary to ensure Community development issues are tackled in the state. From the responses generated, the following recommendations for the newly elected leaders from the just concluded Rivers state elections were deduced;

1. Elected leaders especially the governor and LGA chairmen should focus on the following five pressing issues that need immediate attention;
  - a. Education,
  - b. Employment,
  - c. Security,
  - d. Health and
  - e. Electricity.
2. The newly elected leaders in Rivers state government should take immediate steps in improving development in the state by;
  - a. Dedicating 10% of the state funds to Community development,
  - b. Providing low income loans to community people to start their businesses and
  - c. Including young people in policy and decision-making through regular consultations, town hall meetings and strategic interactions.
3. Lastly, newly elected leaders from the 2019 Rivers state elections should sign a community agenda developed by Rivers Community with strong guarantee to implement it. We however think this step might be challenging in implementation due to the high politicisation of the state





## CONCLUSION

Communities across Rivers state are passionately desirous of true democratic change and a robust effort to eliminate disparities created by weak institutional structures and poor policy implementation in order to engineer for a better society with a tenacity of inclusive development in the state within the next four years of service of their democratically elected leaders.

Top on the agenda in this regards is improvement in the education sector, creation of employment opportunities, improve security as well as Health care delivery and Electricity. All these can be achieved by dedicating at least 10% of the state fund to community development.

Provision of low-income loans and economic support to community people faced with extreme poverty to enable them start up small and medium scale business, other agendas include young people in policy and decision-making.

As well as demanding that the elected leaders should sign a community development agenda with which they can hold their leaders accountable to their promise this simple community demands will help to alleviate urban/Rural poverty, improve Governance and community relations as well as achieving the wishes and aspirations of the people at all levels across the state.

