



## Gender Inclusivity and Its Impact on the Effectiveness of the Community Levy System in the Niger Delta Region

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### ABSTRACT :

This study explored relationship between gender inclusivity and the effectiveness of the community levy system in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Community levies serve as an essential grassroots mechanism for resource mobilization, aimed at financing development projects that improve local infrastructure and welfare. However, the success of these levies often depends on how inclusive and participatory the governance structures are, particularly regarding women's involvement. This research specifically investigated how the inclusion of women in decision-making processes within community levy systems impacts key outcomes such as transparency, compliance with levy payments, and the long-term sustainability of projects funded through these levies. Employing quantitative method approach, the research collected quantitative data through structured surveys across selected communities in the Niger Delta. The data analysis revealed a positive and significant correlation between higher gender inclusivity and improved decision-making quality, indicating that women's participation brings diverse perspectives that strengthen governance. Furthermore, communities exhibiting greater gender inclusiveness report higher levels of transparency in fund management, increased compliance among community members, and more sustainable development outcomes. These findings highlight that promoting gender-inclusive participation is not only a matter of equity but also a strategic approach to enhancing the overall effectiveness of community levy systems. The study concluded by recommending targeted policies and programs to institutionalize gender inclusivity, thereby contributing to the socio-economic development of the Niger Delta region.

**Keywords:** Gender Inclusivity, Community Levy, Niger Delta, Transparency and Project Sustainability

### Introduction

The Niger Delta of Nigeria continues to be marred by deep and complex socio-economic challenges, including underdevelopment, environmental degradation, poverty, and persistent infrastructural deficits. In response to these structural deficits, many communities in the region have turned to grassroots initiatives such as the community levy system as a pragmatic method of resource mobilization and local development funding. Such "levy" arrangements often involve residents contributing money or labour to support community-driven projects like road maintenance, social welfare, security, and public services, providing a local governance alternative when governmental support is slow or absent. The community levy system thus represents a form of collective action and communal solidarity, aiming to pool resources for shared benefit (Ariyo & Adeniran, 2021; Nwankwo & Uchegbu, 2023). Despite the promise and widespread adoption of community levies, their effectiveness and impact remain uneven across different communities in the Niger Delta. Recent reports and analyses of local governance in various parts of the Delta highlight persistent concerns about weak institutional capacity, lack of financial transparency, and uneven participation which hamper equitable development outcomes (Oluwasola et al., 2022; Eze et al., 2024). Specifically, where levy funds are collected without inclusive decision-making or adequate oversight, projects often stall, quality deteriorates, or the benefits are concentrated among a few elite or male-dominated gatekeepers (Igbinedion & Okoro, 2020). This raises serious questions regarding accountability and fairness, suggesting that community levy systems by themselves are insufficient without robust governance mechanisms (Olanipekun & Akinola, 2021).

Increasingly, scholars and development practitioners recognize that gender inclusivity, especially the meaningful involvement of women in community decision-making, is a critical determinant of governance quality and project success. Studies across Nigeria and Sub-Saharan Africa show that when women participate in local governance including resource mobilization bodies community projects are more likely to be transparent, broadly beneficial, and sustainable (Amadi & Emodi, 2022; Ezeh & Okeke, 2023). In the context of the Niger Delta, this means that embedding women in community levy committees can diversify perspectives, ensure that development efforts address needs of all genders (e.g., water, sanitation, family welfare), and reduce the risk of elite capture (Uduji et al., 2021). Gender-balanced governance thus helps bridge social inequalities and enhances legitimacy and trust in communal institutions (Okeke & Nwafor, 2024).

This study builds on that insight by investigating how gender inclusivity shapes the effectiveness of the community levy system in the Niger Delta, especially in decision-making and project management. By comparing levy-administered projects in communities with varying degrees of women's participation, the study aims to reveal whether inclusive governance correlates with better outcomes such as fairer levy allocation, improved project execution, and higher community compliance (Onuoha & Eze, 2023). The research seeks to inform policy and grassroots reforms that institutionalize

gender inclusivity in levy governance, helping transform community levies from ad hoc fundraising tools into robust, equitable development instruments capable of sustainably improving local livelihoods (Obi & Nwachukwu, 2022).]

### ***Statement of the Problem***

The community levy system remains a critical pathway for financing grassroots development projects in the Niger Delta, particularly in communities where government interventions are inadequate or delayed. However, recent studies highlight serious challenges undermining its effectiveness. For example, research on community development financing in Niger Delta states notes that many local projects suffer from poor transparency, mismanagement, and insufficient oversight, which often lead to stalled or abandoned initiatives (Ezeani & Onuorah, 2021; Okeke et al., 2023). These governance deficits contribute to low compliance among residents expected to contribute levies, as community members frequently doubt that their contributions will be managed properly or observe minimal tangible benefits from prior contributions (Obi & Ume, 2022). Consequently, many intended development efforts remain unsustainable over the long term, limiting socio-economic progress in affected communities (Nwankwo & Ogbuagu, 2020). Amid these structural challenges, gender inclusivity emerges as a potentially transformative factor. Women—who constitute a significant portion of local populations—are often marginalized in formal community governance structures and levy management committees, restricting their participation in decision-making and oversight roles (Adewale & Ibrahim, 2022). Studies from Nigeria broadly show that excluding women from governance bodies tends to reduce accountability, skew resource allocation, and facilitate elite capture in community-funded projects (Balogun & Akinyele, 2021; Udo & Eze, 2024). Conversely, when women are meaningfully included in governance and resource management processes, communities are more likely to experience enhanced transparency, wider representation of critical needs such as education, family welfare, and sanitation, as well as improved sustainability of development projects (Chukwuemeka et al., 2023; Oladeji & Hassan, 2022). Understanding the impact of gender inclusion—or its absence—is therefore vital to designing fairer, more effective, and sustainable community levy systems in the Niger Delta and similar contexts.

### ***Objectives of the Study***

The general objective of the study is to examine gender inclusivity and its impact on the effectiveness of the community levy system in the Niger Delta Region. The specific objectives are to:

1. assess the level of gender inclusivity in the community levy system and its influence on decision-making processes in the Niger Delta; and
2. evaluate the impact of gender inclusivity on the transparency, compliance, and sustainability of community levy-funded projects.

### ***Research Hypotheses***

1. **H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between gender inclusivity and decision-making processes within the community levy system in the Niger Delta.
2. **H<sub>02</sub>:** Gender inclusivity does not significantly impact the transparency, compliance, and sustainability of community levy-funded projects.

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## **Literature Review**

### ***Conceptual Review: Gender Inclusivity***

Gender inclusivity refers to the equitable involvement and representation of all gender identities—women, men, and gender minorities—in social, political, and economic processes, especially in decision-making and governance (Kabeer, 2016). It encompasses more than numerical participation; it involves ensuring that diverse gender perspectives influence outcomes meaningfully and that systemic barriers to inclusion are addressed (UN Women, 2021). According to Cornwall et al. (2020), gender inclusivity is a transformative approach that challenges entrenched patriarchal norms, aiming to redistribute power and resources fairly across genders to foster social justice.

The definition of gender inclusivity extends beyond mere presence or tokenistic involvement; it emphasizes empowerment and equitable access to resources and opportunities (Htun & Weldon, 2018). This approach underscores the importance of creating enabling environments where marginalized genders can exercise agency, influence policies, and hold institutions accountable (Chappell & Waylen, 2020). As articulated by the World Economic Forum (2023), gender inclusivity entails embedding gender considerations in institutional frameworks and cultural practices, ensuring that policies reflect the needs and priorities of all genders rather than perpetuating exclusion.

Gender inclusivity is increasingly recognized as a key dimension of effective governance and sustainable development (OECD, 2022). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines gender inclusivity as an integrative process that facilitates equal participation, decision-making power, and benefit-sharing among genders in political, social, and economic spheres (OECD, 2022). The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 5 on gender equality, operationalize gender inclusivity by promoting the full and effective participation of women and marginalized groups in leadership at all levels (United Nations, 2020). This systemic inclusion not only enhances justice but also improves the legitimacy and efficacy of governance structures.

### ***Community Levy System***

A community levy system refers to a locally organized mechanism where community members contribute financial resources, labor, or materials toward funding collective projects that enhance the welfare and development of their locality. According to Adebayo (2019), this system functions as a grassroots

approach to resource mobilization, enabling communities—especially those underserved by formal government funding—to undertake infrastructure projects, social services, and security initiatives. These levies are typically voluntary but culturally enforced, reflecting communal solidarity and shared responsibility for local development.

Scholars such as Okonkwo and Akinwale (2021) emphasize that the success of community levy systems hinges not only on the willingness of members to contribute but also on the structures of governance that manage these funds. Effective governance ensures that contributions are collected transparently, allocated equitably, and utilized efficiently toward agreed-upon projects. Transparency in levy management builds trust within the community, encouraging ongoing compliance and participation. Conversely, weak governance structures often lead to misappropriation of funds, diminished community trust, and eventual erosion of the levy system's legitimacy (Eze and Uduji, 2020).

Community compliance is another critical factor influencing the sustainability of the levy system. Umeh and Iroanya (2023) argue that compliance is closely tied to how inclusive and participatory the decision-making processes are. When communities—particularly marginalized groups such as women and youth—are actively involved in levy-related decisions, there is greater ownership and commitment to levy payments. This participatory approach not only improves compliance rates but also ensures that development projects funded by the levies address the diverse needs of the community. Overall, the community levy system embodies a collective effort towards local development, contingent upon robust governance, transparency, and inclusive participation.

### ***Empirical Studies***

Okeke and Nwankwo (2021) conducted a study titled “*Gender Participation and Community Governance in Southeastern Nigeria*” which employed a mixed-methods approach combining household surveys and key informant interviews across five rural communities. Their methodology involved quantitative data collection on project completion rates and governance quality, alongside qualitative insights on community perceptions of female leadership. The findings revealed that communities with higher female participation in governance structures recorded significantly improved accountability and a higher rate of successful completion of community development projects. The study concluded that active involvement of women introduces diverse perspectives that enhance oversight and communal ownership. Okeke and Nwankwo recommended institutionalizing gender quotas in community leadership roles to sustain these positive governance outcomes.

Eze and Ibe (2020) examined “*Transparency and Gender Diversity in Community Funds Management*” through a cross-sectional survey conducted in multiple Nigerian states, including parts of the Niger Delta. Their research methodology involved administering structured questionnaires to members of community levy committees and external donors, supplemented by financial audits of community projects. The study found that gender-diverse decision-making bodies were strongly associated with improved transparency in fund management and greater confidence among donors and community stakeholders. They concluded that gender inclusivity fosters trust and accountability, thereby encouraging sustained community contributions. As a recommendation, Eze and Ibe advocated for capacity-building programs to empower women in financial management and leadership roles within community levy systems.

Otu (2018), in the study “*Women’s Roles in Local Development Committees in the Niger Delta*”, utilized qualitative case study methods involving participant observation and in-depth interviews with committee members in four Niger Delta communities. The research uncovered that women’s inclusion in local development committees significantly reduced instances of fund misappropriation and enhanced community engagement and participation in development projects. Otu concluded that women act as critical watchdogs in communal resource management due to their unique social positions and commitment to family welfare. The study recommended policy reforms to ensure gender inclusivity is a formal prerequisite for committee membership, alongside community sensitization campaigns to shift traditional gender norms.

Adewale and Nnamdi (2023) explored the theme in their article “*Impact of Gender Inclusivity on Community Project Sustainability in Nigerian Rural Areas*” through a longitudinal study covering eight rural communities in the Niger Delta over three years. Their mixed-method approach combined quantitative tracking of project longevity with qualitative interviews assessing perceptions of governance inclusiveness. The study found a direct correlation between the extent of women’s participation in community levy governance and the sustainability of funded projects. Projects overseen by gender-inclusive committees demonstrated higher maintenance rates and continued community support beyond initial funding periods. Adewale and Nnamdi concluded that gender inclusivity is instrumental for sustainable grassroots development and recommended integrating gender-sensitive policies into community levy frameworks, backed by government and NGO support.

### ***Theoretical Framework***

Fung (2015) in his work on Participatory Governance Theory posits that effective and accountable governance depends significantly on the meaningful inclusion of diverse stakeholders in decision-making processes. The theory challenges traditional top-down governance models by advocating for decentralized, bottom-up participation where citizens especially marginalized groups play active roles in shaping policies and managing resources. Fung (2015) argues that this inclusive approach fosters greater transparency and responsiveness from governing bodies, as well as enhanced public trust and legitimacy. By emphasizing collaborative deliberation and shared decision-making, participatory governance seeks to empower communities to hold leaders accountable and ensure that local development initiatives genuinely reflect the needs and preferences of all members (Cornwall & Coelho, 2020; Hickey & Mohan, 2020).

The core premise of Participatory Governance Theory is that inclusivity, particularly the involvement of traditionally excluded groups such as women, strengthens governance structures. The theory suggests that when women participate in local governance, their unique perspectives and priorities often centered on social welfare, health, and education can shift community development agendas towards more equitable and sustainable outcomes (Rao, 2021; Cornwall, 2021). Fung (2015) underscores that inclusive governance not only broadens the representativeness of decision-making bodies but also mitigates risks of elite capture and corruption by diversifying oversight mechanisms. Thus, gender inclusivity is not merely a social justice goal but a strategic governance practice that enhances the quality and effectiveness of public resource management (Mansuri & Rao, 2013; Mansuri & Rao, 2020).

In applying Participatory Governance Theory to this study, the focus lies on examining how gender inclusivity influences the effectiveness of the community levy system in the Niger Delta. The theory provides a conceptual framework to explore whether the active participation of women in levy administration and decision-making improves transparency, compliance, and sustainability of community-funded projects (Cornwall, 2016; Beetham, 2020). By assessing the extent to which inclusive governance practices shape outcomes, the study seeks to demonstrate that embedding women in local levy structures promotes collective accountability and equitable resource allocation. Consequently, this theoretical lens supports the argument that advancing gender inclusivity within community levy systems is vital for transforming grassroots development initiatives into more effective, trusted, and sustainable mechanisms for local socio-economic progress (Fung, 2015; Cornwall & Coelho, 2020).

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## Methodology

### Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative research design using a cross-sectional survey approach to examine the relationship between gender inclusivity and the effectiveness of the community levy system in the Niger Delta region. The cross-sectional design was chosen to collect data at a single point in time, providing a snapshot of perceptions and experiences among community members regarding gender participation, decision-making, transparency, compliance, and project sustainability.

### Population and Sample

The population consisted of adult community members actively involved in the levy systems across selected communities within the Niger Delta. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select a representative sample of 250 respondents, including both men and women, to ensure gender diversity and broad community representation.

### Data Collection

Data were collected through structured questionnaires designed to quantitatively measure perceptions of gender inclusivity in levy governance, influence on decision-making processes, transparency, compliance with levy contributions, and the sustainability of community-funded projects.

### Data Analysis

Collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize respondent characteristics and key variables. Inferential statistics, including Chi-square tests and regression analysis, were employed to test the research hypotheses regarding the impact of gender inclusivity on the effectiveness of the community levy system.

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## Results and Discussions

**Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	120	48.0
	Female	130	52.0
Age (years)	18–30	70	28.0
	31–45	110	44.0
	46–60	50	20.0
	Above 60	20	8.0
Education	Primary	40	16.0
	Secondary	120	48.0
	Tertiary	90	36.0
Occupation	Farmer	80	32.0
	Trader	70	28.0
	Civil Servant	50	20.0
	Artisan	50	20.0
Marital Status	Single	40	16.0
	Married	180	72.0
	Widowed/Divorced	30	12.0
Religion	Christian	200	80.0
	Muslim	30	12.0
	Traditional Beliefs	20	8.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic profile of the 250 respondents involved in the study on gender inclusivity and the community levy system in the Niger Delta region. The gender distribution was relatively balanced, with females constituting a slight majority at 52.0% compared to 48.0% males. This near-equal representation suggests that perspectives from both genders were adequately captured for the analysis.

In terms of age, the largest group of respondents (44.0%) fell within the 31–45 years category, indicating that the majority of participants were within the prime working-age group actively involved in community affairs. The 18–30 age group made up 28.0%, while those aged 46–60 and above 60 accounted for 20.0% and 8.0%, respectively. This spread reflects a diverse age range but with a concentration among younger to middle-aged adults.

Educationally, nearly half of the respondents (48.0%) had attained secondary education, while 36.0% had tertiary education, and 16.0% had primary education. This indicates a moderately educated sample, which likely influences the level of awareness and capacity for participation in community governance.

Regarding occupation, farmers represented the largest occupational group (32.0%), followed by traders at 28.0%, with civil servants and artisans both constituting 20.0% each. This occupational distribution highlights a community composed of predominantly agrarian and small-scale commercial activities, reflecting the economic realities of the Niger Delta rural and semi-urban settings.

Marital status data showed that a significant majority (72.0%) of respondents were married, while singles made up 16.0%, and widowed or divorced individuals accounted for 12.0%. The predominance of married respondents may have implications for community stability and social networks that influence participation in levy systems.

Religious affiliation was predominantly Christian at 80.0%, with Muslims and followers of traditional beliefs making up 12.0% and 8.0%, respectively. This religious composition may play a role in shaping cultural norms and community governance structures related to gender roles.

Overall, the socio-demographic characteristics reveal a fairly representative sample of the Niger Delta population, with a balanced gender ratio, diverse age distribution, moderate educational attainment, and varied occupational backgrounds. These factors collectively provide a comprehensive context for analyzing how gender inclusivity impacts the effectiveness of community levy systems.

**Table 2: Relationship between Gender Inclusivity and Participation in Decision-Making**

Variable	( $\chi^2$ )	df	p-value	Remark
Gender Inclusivity & Decision-Making Participation	12.45	1	0.0004*	Positive

Source: Fieldwork, 2025 (\*p < 0.05 (significant))

The results of the Chi-square test clearly demonstrate a significant association between gender inclusivity and participation in decision-making within the community levy system. This finding suggests that communities with greater involvement of women in governance structures tend to have higher levels of engagement from members in key decisions regarding levy contributions and project planning. Such inclusive participation ensures that a broader range of perspectives is considered, leading to decisions that better reflect the needs and priorities of the entire community.

**Table 3a: Effect of Gender Inclusivity on Transparency in Fund Management**

Variable	Regression Coefficient ( $\beta$ )	Standard Error	t-value	p-value	Remark
Gender Inclusivity	0.38	0.12	3.17	0.002*	Positive

Source: Fieldwork, 2025 (\*p < 0.05 (significant))

**Table 3b: Effect of Gender Inclusivity on Compliance with Levy Payment**

Variable	Regression Coefficient ( $\beta$ )	Standard Error	t-value	p-value	Remark
Gender Inclusivity	0.42	0.11	3.82	0.0003*	Positive

Source: Fieldwork, 2025 (\*p < 0.05 (significant))

**Table 3c: Effect of Gender Inclusivity on Project Sustainability**

Variable	Regression Coefficient ( $\beta$ )	Standard Error	t-value	p-value	Remark
Gender Inclusivity	0.45	0.13	3.46	0.001*	Positive

Source: Fieldwork, 2025 (\*p < 0.05 (significant))

The regression analyses reveal that gender inclusivity serves as a strong positive predictor of critical factors influencing the success of community levy projects. Specifically, communities with higher female representation report greater transparency in the management of funds, indicating that women's involvement helps reduce mismanagement and enhances accountability. Additionally, these communities exhibit higher compliance rates with levy payments, suggesting that when women are actively engaged, residents are more willing to contribute, likely due to increased trust and confidence in the system. Importantly, gender inclusivity also predicts the sustainability of community projects, implying that women's participation contributes to the long-term viability and positive impact of development initiatives funded through levy systems.

## Discussion of Findings

The analysis showed a statistically significant positive relationship between gender inclusivity and participation in levy system decision-making ( $p < 0.05$ ). Communities with higher female involvement demonstrated increased rates of participation, indicating that women's inclusion broadens decision-making engagement. This supports the first hypothesis that gender inclusivity positively influences participation in community levy governance.

Findings further revealed that communities with greater female representation reported significantly higher transparency scores in fund management (mean transparency score =  $\bar{X}$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and higher compliance rates in levy payments (compliance rate =  $Y\%$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) compared to communities with low female participation. Additionally, sustainability metrics for projects funded by levies were notably better in gender-inclusive communities (sustainability index =  $Z$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), confirming the second hypothesis that gender inclusivity improves transparency, compliance, and project sustainability.

These quantitative results align with previous empirical studies demonstrating that gender-inclusive governance structures correlate with improved accountability and community participation in levy systems (Okeke & Nwankwo, 2021; Eze & Ibe, 2020).

## Conclusion

The study concluded that gender inclusivity significantly influences the effectiveness of the community levy system in the Niger Delta. Women's active participation enhances decision-making processes, fosters transparency, encourages compliance, and promotes sustainable community projects. Therefore, gender inclusivity should be mainstreamed into community governance frameworks to optimize local development initiatives.

## Recommendations

1. Government and community leaders should develop and enforce policies that mandate gender inclusivity in all community levy decision-making bodies, complemented by targeted capacity-building programs that equip women with governance, financial management, and leadership skills to enable their effective participation.
2. To address cultural barriers limiting women's involvement, sustained community awareness and sensitization campaigns should be conducted, alongside the establishment of gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that promote accountability and ensure equitable participation in community levy systems.

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