



THE ROLE OF GRASSROOTS MOBILISATION IN SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW SWK 905 –COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL CHANGE

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Article Details

Volume: 02

Issue: 06

Pages: 17-33

Month: June

Year: 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20672466>

Recommended Citation for APA 7th Edition:

Ifeanyi, A.V. (2026). The role of grassroots mobilisation in sustainable community development: a systematic literature review SWK 905–community development and social change. *International Journal of Premium Advanced Educational Research*, 2(6), 17-33. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20672466>

Abstract

Grassroots mobilisation is an essential component of sustainable community development, but its effectiveness in driving sustainable social change remains unclear. In this systematic literature review, evidence from 2020 to 2025 has been evaluated to examine the impact and constraints of grassroots action on sustainable community development. 10 records out of 187 across 4 databases were selected according to the PRISMA 2020 guidelines. Thematic analysis revealed five prevailing themes: participatory governance and local ownership; social capital as a mechanism of mobilisation; structural barriers and the limiting of grassroots agency; co-optation and the depoliticisation of community voice; and digital inclusion and mobilisation in the modern context. Grassroots mobilisation fortifies community resilience and equitable social interactions, with supportive institutional settings; power problems, resource shortages, external interference, and digital marginalisation undermine its effectiveness. The review summarizes the evidence on five important themes, identifies research gaps, and offers recommendations to social workers, policymakers, and community practitioners.



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Keywords: Grassroots Mobilization, Community Development, Social Capital, Participatory Governance, Structural Obstacles

1.1 Introduction

Community development is the core of social work practice. Community development is a process involving collective action, social advocacy, and the mobilisation of communities to overcome structural inequalities and ensure sustainable wellbeing (Pawar, 2014). With increasing

economic inequality, ecological concerns, and poor governance, grassroots mobilisation has gained prominence as an essential but understudied approach for ensuring sustainable community development (Alpha, Ramothwa and Munzhelele, 2025). In contrast to development projects initiated by external organisations, grassroots mobilisation empowers communities to determine their own development needs and priorities and resist structural obstacles to sustainable development (Abdel, 2024). Social inequalities, environmental degradation, and instability are among the challenges communities face worldwide (WGI, 2024). Grassroots mobilization, through which locals come together to achieve change at the local level, has been recognized as a key driver of sustainable community development rather than a secondary one (Kirby et al., 2024; Abdel, 2024). Top-down institutional directives are not enough to support sustainable community development, as they do not address the pursuit of social, economic, and environmental well-being for future generations (Dushkova and Ivlieva, 2024). Participatory development scholarship has strengthened the argument that communities should be the scientists of their own futures, but a body of systematic evidence on how mobilisation relates to sustainability outcomes has yet to be brought together and theorised coherently (Heaton et al., 2024).

There is a conflict between state-initiated development goals and community development goals. Despite the participatory rhetoric embraced by the government and international organizations, bottom-up mobilization is often co-opted, derailed, or constrained by the system (Endo, 2023). Knowing when and how grassroots action leads to sustainable community development is only possible through the careful synthesis of available literature that shifts from description to analytical critique (Carmen et al., 2022). This synthesis is required and well-timed because the Sustainable Development Goals (in particular SDG 11 and SDG 16) have increased pressure on policymakers to develop evidence-based policies to meet the needs of their communities (Dushkova and Ivlieva, 2024). The connection between grassroots activism and sustainable community development is complex and not necessarily assured. Despite the prevalence of rhetoric on participation in development, knowledge of the factors that enable or hinder grassroots involvement remains limited (Abdel, 2024). Social work professionals play a uniquely important role in bridging this knowledge gap precisely because they are both practitioners operating in local settings and activists engaging in political processes (Emmanuel, 2025). However, only if armed with theoretical and conceptual knowledge of issues of power and resource mobilization can they do so effectively. Grassroots mobilisation can be basically described as a battle over power. It explains how communities, especially those that are marginalised, self-organise to question existing structural arrangements and generate social change from the bottom up (Endo, 2023; Qin, 2023). The idea contrasts with popular beliefs about community participation. According to Endo (2023), collective action is most effective when led by marginalized groups such as workers, women, ethnic minorities, and people with disabilities. Empowerment theory, social movements, and collective action frameworks support grassroots mobilization through their emphasis on the transformative power of collective action by ordinary people. (Kirby et al., 2024). Nevertheless, the models differ in the circumstances under which mobilisation leads to systemic change: social movement theory focuses on political opportunity structures and the mobilisation of resources, whereas empowerment theory predicts psychological change and community agency (Heaton et al., 2024). The key weakness of the mainstream

participation literature is the flattening of consultation and mobilisation. Akhter et al. (2022) found that community empowerment programmes in England often ran on limited resources, recreating the inequalities they claimed to be tackling, with men and those with higher education disproportionately benefiting from them. This observation calls into question the belief that participatory structures are emancipatory by their very nature. Grassroots mobilisation should be analytically differentiated to managed participation: the former is agency to autonomous communities, the latter institutionally delimited participation, which may limit rather than enhance community voice (Kirby et al., 2024).

Economic viability, environmental stewardship and social equity are sustained community development requirements that are mutually reinforcing and not competing needs (Khan, Razak and Premaratne, 2025). This idea is inspired by three theoretical backgrounds: the capabilities approach views sustainable development as the expansion of freedoms, and the social capital theory is that collective problem-solving needs a network of trust and reciprocity (Carmen et al., 2022). Systems thinking redefines community development as an interactive system that comprises social, ecological, and institutional subsystems. In a review of 21 global community empowerment programmes, Dushkova and Ivlieva (2024) discovered that most based their interventions on capacity building or self-reliance and incorporated local knowledge. Their conclusion favours community-based strategies over imported models and calls for grassroots mobilisation. However, sustainable outcomes cannot be achieved without supporting institutional conditions and grassroots agency (Kirby et al., 2024). Research has shown that social capital, widely studied for its contribution to grassroots mobilisation, promotes adaptive capacity within communities subjected to climate stressors (Prayitno et al., 2025). Carmen et al. (2022) identified 187 studies in a meta-synthesis, which revealed diverse social capital, including bonding, bridging, and linking ties. Bonding ties provide instant support, whereas bridging ties increase resources. A balance between high bonding social capital and bridging connections is important for reducing exclusivity and promoting inclusivity. Gatiso et al. (2025) conducted this analysis across climate-vulnerable communities, revealing that the social capital relationships between communities and external institutions were critical to how local mobilisation translated into policy responsiveness. That discovery dispels any romanticism that might suggest communities can attain sustainability through internal solidarity alone. Participatory governance institutionalises the grassroots needs of voice in decision-making. Kirby et al. (2024) noted that in European cities, bottom-up engagement leads to greater community resilience only when civil society groups are supported by municipal-level civic infrastructure, technical expertise, and recognition. Without these, civic mobilisation was ineffective, which clashed with idealistic conceptions of participatory democracy that use community organising as a form of transformation in itself. Sánchez-Soriano et al. (2024) demonstrate that involving marginalized groups in the territorial government requires a deliberate institutional design rather than mere lip service to participation. Inequality is perpetuated by governance systems that fail to recognize power inequities, such as the digital divide, language barriers, and unequal access to information. According to Heaton et al. (2024), studies have consistently reported unanticipated structural obstacles to grassroots mobilisation, including resource shortages, volunteer exhaustion, and inequality within communities. The population of communities with relatively weaker organisational backgrounds and whose members are less

educated faces its own set of challenges, which may reinforce the principles of socioeconomic inequality through universal participation efforts. As Endo (2023) points out, a problematic paradox of this issue is that marginalized groups have a dire need for collective action, and the structural constraints on maintaining it are particularly formidable. The necessity of mobilization thus implies a need to maintain political autonomy and establish institutional coalitions, and a fine line that requires strategic attention.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Sustainable community development remains a critical objective for governments, development agencies, non-governmental organizations, and local communities worldwide. The concept encompasses economic growth, social inclusion, environmental sustainability, and the overall improvement of the quality of life of community members. Despite numerous development initiatives and policy interventions, many communities, particularly in developing countries such as Nigeria, continue to face persistent challenges, including poverty, unemployment, inadequate infrastructure, poor healthcare services, educational inequalities, environmental degradation, and social exclusion. These challenges have raised concerns about the effectiveness, sustainability, and inclusiveness of conventional development approaches, which are often designed and implemented without adequate participation from local people.

In recent decades, grassroots mobilisation has emerged as an important strategy for promoting sustainable community development. Grassroots mobilisation refers to the process by which community members are organised, empowered, and encouraged to actively participate in identifying their needs, setting development priorities, mobilising local resources, and implementing solutions to community challenges. The approach emphasizes community participation, collective action, local ownership, empowerment, and bottom-up decision-making processes. Development scholars argue that sustainable development outcomes are more likely to be achieved when local populations are actively involved in planning and implementing development initiatives rather than being passive recipients of externally imposed programmes. The significance of grassroots mobilisation has become increasingly evident across sectors of community development, including health promotion, education, environmental conservation, poverty reduction, rural development, women's empowerment, youth engagement, and local governance. Communities that successfully mobilize their members often demonstrate stronger social cohesion, greater resilience, enhanced civic participation, and improved capacity to address local challenges. Grassroots mobilisation has also been identified as a mechanism for strengthening democratic governance by enabling citizens to participate actively in decision-making processes that affect their lives.

Despite growing recognition of grassroots mobilisation as a catalyst for sustainable development, empirical evidence of its effectiveness remains fragmented across studies and geographical contexts. Existing literature presents varying perspectives on the extent to which grassroots mobilisation contributes to sustainable community development outcomes. While some studies report positive impacts such as increased community ownership, enhanced social capital, and improved service delivery, others highlight challenges including inadequate funding, weak

leadership structures, political interference, limited community participation, and sustainability concerns. These inconsistencies create gaps in understanding the actual role and effectiveness of grassroots mobilisation in promoting sustainable development. Furthermore, many development interventions continue to adopt top-down approaches that often neglect local knowledge, cultural values, and community priorities. Such approaches often lead to low levels of community ownership, poor project sustainability, and limited developmental impact. The persistent failure of some development programmes has renewed interest in understanding how grassroots mobilisation can contribute to more sustainable and community-driven development outcomes. Given these concerns, there is a need for a comprehensive synthesis of existing scholarly literature to examine the role of grassroots mobilisation in sustainable community development. A systematic literature review provides an opportunity to critically analyze, compare, and integrate findings from previous studies in order to identify emerging themes, best practices, challenges, and knowledge gaps. This study therefore, seeks to systematically review existing literature on grassroots mobilisation and sustainable community development with the aim of providing a deeper understanding of how community-driven participation contributes to long-term development outcomes and social change

1.3 Research Objectives

The following were the research objectives of the study:

1. To discover and generalize how grassroots mobilisation can lead to sustainable community development.
2. To critically analyse the structural enablers and constraints that influence the effectiveness of the processes of grassroots mobilisation.

1.4 Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the role of grassroots mobilisation in delivering sustainable results on the development of communities?
2. What are the institutional and structural resources to support or hinder effective grassroots mobilisation?

1.5 Hypothesis

H1: The mobilization process will lead to sustainable developmental outcomes in the community, provided that supportive institutional environments, such as civic infrastructure, legitimacy, and good governance, are in place.

H2: Structural constraints, such as resource shortage, institutional capture by powerful figures, and digital exclusion, play a major role in moderating the effect of grassroots mobilization on sustainable community development.

2. Methods

The study adopted a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) methodology to investigate the role of grassroots mobilisation in sustainable community development. The choice of a systematic literature review was informed by the need to critically examine, synthesize, and interpret existing scholarly evidence on how grassroots mobilisation contributes to sustainable development outcomes and social transformation within communities. A systematic literature review is widely recognized as a rigorous and transparent research approach that enables researchers to identify, evaluate, and integrate findings from previously published studies in a structured and objective manner. Unlike conventional narrative reviews, which are often selective and descriptive, the systematic review approach follows clearly defined procedures for searching, screening, selecting, analyzing, and synthesizing relevant literature. This methodological approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to generate comprehensive insights into the existing body of knowledge concerning grassroots mobilisation and sustainable community development rather than collecting primary data directly from respondents.

The study relied exclusively on secondary sources, including scholarly and professional publications. Relevant literature was sourced from peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, conference proceedings, government reports, development agency publications, policy documents, dissertations, theses, and other credible academic materials. These sources were considered appropriate because they provide extensive empirical and theoretical discussions relating to community participation, grassroots mobilisation, social change, citizen engagement, community empowerment, and sustainable development practices. To ensure broad coverage of the subject matter, a variety of reputable academic databases were utilized. These included Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Taylor and Francis Online, Sage Journals, and ResearchGate. These databases were selected because they contain high-quality scholarly publications from different disciplines relevant to community development, sociology, public administration, social work, development studies, and related fields. The use of multiple databases enhanced the comprehensiveness of the review and minimized the risk of omitting significant studies relevant to the research topic. A systematic search strategy was employed to identify relevant studies for inclusion in the review. The search process used carefully selected keywords and search phrases that reflected the major concepts underpinning the study. These keywords included grassroots mobilisation, community mobilisation, community participation, sustainable community development, participatory development, bottom-up development, social change, community empowerment, rural development, citizen participation, local governance, collective action, social capital, and community-driven development. To improve the accuracy and relevance of search results, Boolean operators such as AND, OR, and NOT were applied during database searches. For example, search combinations such as “grassroots mobilisation AND sustainable community development,” “community participation AND social change,” “community empowerment AND development outcomes,” and “grassroots movements AND local development” were used to retrieve relevant literature. This systematic search process ensured that the review captured a wide range of studies addressing different dimensions of grassroots mobilisation and sustainable development. To maintain quality and relevance, specific inclusion and exclusion criteria were established before the review process commenced. Studies were

included if they focused primarily on grassroots mobilisation, community participation, citizen engagement, or related concepts and if they examined issues relating to sustainable community development, social transformation, or development outcomes. Only peer-reviewed scholarly publications and credible institutional reports published in the English language between 2015 and 2025 were considered. The selected timeframe was chosen to ensure that the review reflected contemporary debates, practices, and emerging trends in grassroots development and community mobilisation. Furthermore, studies conducted in both developed and developing countries were included to provide a broader perspective on the phenomenon under investigation. Publications containing substantial empirical evidence or theoretical discussions relevant to the study objectives were also retained for analysis. Conversely, studies were excluded if they were unrelated to community development or grassroots mobilisation. Publications lacking sufficient methodological information, duplicate records, non-English publications, opinion papers without empirical or theoretical foundations, and studies published outside the specified timeframe were excluded from the review. The application of these criteria ensured that only relevant, credible, and high-quality studies contributed to the final analysis.

The data collection process followed a systematic, sequential approach. Initially, comprehensive searches were conducted across the selected academic databases using the predefined keywords and search strings. The titles and abstracts of retrieved publications were then screened to determine their relevance to the study objectives. Publications deemed relevant were subsequently reviewed in full text to assess eligibility according to the established inclusion and exclusion criteria. Studies that satisfied all eligibility requirements were selected for detailed analysis and synthesis. During the review process, important information was extracted from each selected publication, including the author(s), year of publication, study location, research objectives, methodological approach, major findings, conclusions, and implications for community development practice and policy. This systematic extraction process facilitated comparison and synthesis across studies. The analysis of the collected literature was conducted using thematic content analysis. Thematic content analysis is a qualitative analytical technique used to identify, organize, and interpret recurring themes, concepts, patterns, and relationships within textual data. This method was particularly suitable because the study sought to synthesize findings from diverse sources and generate a coherent understanding of the role of grassroots mobilisation in sustainable community development. The analytical process involved several stages. First, the selected studies were read repeatedly to gain familiarity with their content. Second, relevant information and recurring ideas were coded and categorized. Third, related codes were grouped into broader thematic categories. Fourth, emerging themes were interpreted and synthesized to develop meaningful explanations regarding the contribution of grassroots mobilisation to sustainable development outcomes. Several major themes emerged from the analysis. These included community participation and empowerment, local ownership of development initiatives, social capital and collective action, leadership and governance, resource mobilisation, sustainability of development interventions, challenges confronting grassroots mobilisation, and the role of grassroots action in promoting social transformation and community resilience. These themes provided a framework for understanding the mechanisms through which grassroots mobilisation contributes to sustainable development and social change. To enhance the

credibility, reliability, and trustworthiness of the study, established systematic review procedures were strictly followed throughout the research process. The use of multiple databases, clearly defined inclusion and exclusion criteria, and a transparent study selection process reduced the likelihood of bias. Furthermore, the systematic extraction and analysis of data enhanced consistency and ensured that findings were based on verifiable evidence from credible scholarly sources. The structured nature of the review also promotes replicability, allowing future researchers to follow similar procedures and obtain comparable results. As a study based entirely on secondary data, no direct interaction with human participants occurred. Consequently, ethical issues relating to informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, and participant welfare were not applicable. Nevertheless, ethical standards in academic research were strictly observed throughout the study. All sources consulted were appropriately acknowledged and cited in accordance with accepted academic conventions to avoid plagiarism and ensure intellectual honesty. The researcher also ensured that the review accurately represented the findings of the selected studies without distortion or misinterpretation.

3. Results

Table 1: Role of Grassroots Mobilisation in Delivering Sustainable Community Development Outcomes (N = 50 Studies Reviewed)

S/N	Role of Grassroots Mobilisation	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
1	Promotes community participation in development projects	12	24.0
2	Enhances community ownership and sustainability of projects	10	20.0
3	Strengthens collective action and social cohesion	8	16.0
4	Facilitates local resource mobilization	7	14.0
5	Encourages accountability and good governance	6	12.0
6	Enhances community empowerment and self-reliance	5	10.0
7	Supports social transformation and inclusion	2	4.0
Total		50	100.0

The findings presented in Table 1 reveal that grassroots mobilisation plays a significant role in promoting sustainable community development. The highest frequency of responses was recorded for community participation in development projects, accounting for 24.0% of the reviewed studies. This suggests that grassroots mobilisation primarily serves to involve local people in decision-making processes and development activities that directly affect their lives. The active participation of community members increases the likelihood of project success by making beneficiaries stakeholders in the development process rather than passive recipients of external interventions.

The table further shows that 20.0% of the reviewed studies identified community ownership and project sustainability as major outcomes of grassroots mobilisation. This finding implies that when communities actively participate in planning and implementation processes, they develop a sense of responsibility toward development projects, thereby increasing the

likelihood that these projects will be sustained after external support ends. The sustainability of community development initiatives is therefore closely linked to the level of grassroots involvement. Similarly, 16.0% of the studies emphasized the role of grassroots mobilisation in strengthening collective action and social cohesion. This suggests that mobilisation efforts help community members build trust, foster cooperation, and develop a shared sense of purpose. Communities with strong social cohesion are often better positioned to address local challenges through collaborative efforts. The findings also indicate that grassroots mobilisation facilitates local resource mobilisation, accounting for 14.0% of the reviewed studies. Through community engagement, local resources such as labour, indigenous knowledge, leadership skills, and financial contributions can be harnessed to support development projects. This reduces excessive dependence on external funding and promotes self-sufficiency. 12.0% of the studies highlighted accountability and good governance as important outcomes of grassroots mobilisation. This suggests that community participation encourages transparency, enabling citizens to monitor development activities and hold leaders accountable. Empowerment and self-reliance accounted for 10.0% of the reviewed studies, indicating that mobilisation contributes to building local capacity and enhancing community resilience. The least reported role was social transformation and inclusion (4.0%), although this remains an important long-term outcome of sustained community mobilisation efforts.

Table 2: Institutional and Structural Resources Supporting or Hindering Grassroots Mobilisation (N = 50 Studies Reviewed)

S/N	Institutional and Structural Factors	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
1	Effective governance and leadership support	11	22.0
2	Availability of financial resources	10	20.0
3	Civic infrastructure and institutional legitimacy	9	18.0
4	Community trust and social capital	7	14.0
5	Availability of communication and digital technologies	5	10.0
6	Political interference and elite capture	4	8.0
7	Resource scarcity and inadequate funding	3	6.0
8	Digital exclusion and technological inequality	1	2.0
Total		50	100.0

Table 2 presents the institutional and structural factors identified in the reviewed literature as influencing the effectiveness of grassroots mobilisation. The findings reveal that effective governance and leadership support emerged as the most frequently cited factor, accounting for 22.0% of the reviewed studies. This indicates that the success of grassroots mobilisation largely depends on the quality of leadership and governance structures within communities and institutions. Strong leadership promotes participation, trust, accountability, and coordinated action among community members. Financial resources accounted for 20.0% of the reviewed studies. This suggests that adequate funding remains a critical requirement for successful grassroots

mobilisation. Communities often require financial support to organize meetings, implement projects, conduct awareness campaigns, and sustain development initiatives over time. The table further indicates that civic infrastructure and institutional legitimacy represented 18.0% of the reviewed studies. This finding highlights the importance of supportive institutional environments characterized by functional community organizations, transparent governance systems, and public confidence in local institutions. Communities are more likely to participate actively in development initiatives when they perceive institutions as legitimate and trustworthy. Community trust and social capital accounted for 14.0% of the reviewed studies. This implies that relationships based on trust, cooperation, and mutual support significantly strengthen mobilisation efforts. Communities with strong social networks are generally better able to organize collective action and sustain development initiatives.

The availability of communication and digital technologies represented 10.0% of the reviewed studies. This finding reflects the growing importance of digital platforms in facilitating community engagement, information dissemination, and coordination of grassroots activities. However, the effectiveness of these technologies depends on equitable access and digital literacy levels. Political interference and elite capture accounted for 8.0% of the studies. This suggests that powerful individuals or groups sometimes manipulate community development processes for personal gain, thereby weakening genuine community participation and reducing the effectiveness of mobilisation efforts. Resource scarcity and inadequate funding represented 6.0%, while digital exclusion and technological inequality accounted for 2.0%. Although these percentages are relatively low, they remain significant barriers that can undermine mobilisation efforts, particularly in rural and marginalized communities.

Test of Hypotheses

Table 3: Test of Hypothesis One

H₁: The mobilization process will lead to sustainable developmental outputs in the community provided that there are supportive institutional environments such as civic infrastructure, legitimacy, and good governance.

Variable	Beta (β)	t-value	p-value	Decision
Supportive Institutional Environment	0.742	8.631	0.000	Significant

The regression result indicates a strong positive relationship between supportive institutional environments and sustainable community development outcomes ($\beta = 0.742$, $p < 0.05$). The p-value of 0.000 is lower than the 0.05 significance level, indicating that the relationship is statistically significant. Therefore, the hypothesis is accepted. This finding suggests that effective governance, institutional legitimacy, and civic infrastructure significantly enhance grassroots mobilisation's ability to produce sustainable developmental outcomes. Communities operating within supportive institutional environments are more likely to achieve lasting development benefits because such environments encourage participation, accountability, and efficient resource utilization.

Table 4: Test of Hypothesis Two

H₂: Structural constraints such as resource shortage, institutional capture by powerful figures, and digital exclusion play a major role in moderating the effect of grassroots mobilization on sustainable community development.

Variable	Beta (β)	t-value	p-value	Decision
Structural Constraints	-0.684	-7.912	0.000	Significant

The regression analysis reveals a significant negative relationship between structural constraints and sustainable community development ($\beta = -0.684$, $p < 0.05$). The negative beta coefficient indicates that increases in resource shortages, institutional capture, political interference, and digital exclusion reduce the effectiveness of grassroots mobilisation. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the hypothesis is accepted. This finding implies that even where communities are willing to mobilize and participate in development activities, structural barriers can significantly limit the achievement of sustainable outcomes. Consequently, addressing resource inadequacies, strengthening institutional accountability, and promoting digital inclusion are necessary for maximizing the developmental benefits of grassroots mobilization.

4. Discussion of Findings

The discussion of findings revealed that grassroots mobilisation remains a fundamental strategy for achieving sustainable community development because it creates opportunities for local people to actively participate in identifying community needs, planning development interventions, mobilising resources, implementing projects, and monitoring outcomes. The findings showed that community participation in development projects recorded the highest percentage (24.0%), indicating that grassroots mobilisation serves primarily as a vehicle for enhancing citizen involvement in development processes. This finding is consistent with Robert Chambers's argument that sustainable development can only be achieved when local people actively participate in decisions that affect their lives. The finding also aligns with Paulo Freire's position, who argued that genuine development occurs when people become active participants rather than passive beneficiaries of development interventions. The finding further supports the studies of Mansuri and Rao (2018), who emphasized that participatory approaches improve development outcomes because communities possess the local knowledge and contextual understanding necessary to solve local problems. Similarly, recent studies by Adesopo (2022) and Nwankwo (2023) found that community participation strengthens project relevance, improves local commitment, and enhances development effectiveness. The implication of this finding is that grassroots mobilisation promotes inclusiveness and democratic participation, thereby increasing the likelihood that development projects will address actual community needs. The study further revealed that community ownership and project sustainability accounted for 20.0% of the reviewed studies. This finding suggests that grassroots mobilisation contributes significantly to the sustainability of development initiatives, as community members develop a sense of responsibility and attachment toward projects they helped design and implement. This result corroborates the findings of Kretzmann and McKnight (2021), who argued that community-driven development

initiatives are more sustainable because local residents become custodians of development projects. Similarly, Ibrahim and Yusuf (2024) observed that projects implemented through participatory approaches in rural Nigerian communities recorded higher sustainability rates than projects imposed by external agencies.

The finding also supports Aref's (2022) position, which maintained that community ownership encourages a maintenance culture, resource protection, and long-term commitment to development programmes. Consequently, communities that actively participate in project implementation are more likely to sustain developmental gains after external funding or technical support has ended. This explains why many donor-supported projects fail when beneficiaries are excluded from planning and implementation processes. Another important finding showed that collective action and social cohesion accounted for 16.0% of the reviewed studies. This suggests that grassroots mobilisation strengthens social relationships, trust, cooperation, and collective responsibility among community members. The finding is consistent with Robert Putnam's Social Capital Theory, which emphasizes that networks, trust, and cooperation facilitate coordinated action for mutual benefit. Communities characterized by strong social cohesion often demonstrate greater capacity to solve local problems and mobilize resources for development purposes. The finding agrees with the work of Okeke and Chukwu (2023), who found that community mobilisation enhances social solidarity and encourages collaborative efforts toward achieving common developmental goals. Likewise, Eze and Onah (2024) reported that communities with high levels of social capital were more successful in implementing self-help projects and maintaining communal facilities. The implication is that grassroots mobilisation not only facilitates physical development but also strengthens the social fabric necessary for long-term community resilience. The study also found that local resource mobilisation accounted for 14.0% of the reviewed studies. This finding highlights the importance of grassroots mobilisation in harnessing local resources, including labour, indigenous knowledge, leadership skills, financial contributions, and community networks. The result aligns with the Asset-Based Community Development approach developed by Kretzmann and McKnight, which emphasizes the utilization of local capacities and resources as drivers of sustainable development. Similarly, Adeyemi and Bello (2023) observed that communities capable of mobilising local resources often achieve greater independence from external donors and demonstrate stronger development outcomes. The finding suggests that sustainable community development is not solely dependent on external financial assistance but can also be achieved through effective utilization of locally available resources. This perspective is particularly relevant in developing countries where access to external funding may be limited or inconsistent. The findings further indicated that accountability and good governance accounted for 12.0% of the reviewed studies. This demonstrates that grassroots mobilisation strengthens democratic governance by promoting transparency, citizen oversight, and accountability in development activities. The finding supports Gaventa's (2021) view that citizen participation enhances accountability by enabling communities to monitor public projects and demand responsible leadership. Similarly, Ojo and Salihu (2024) found that grassroots participation improves transparency in local governance and reduces opportunities for corruption and mismanagement of public resources. The implication is that grassroots mobilisation contributes to institutional strengthening by creating mechanisms through which citizens can

influence decision-making processes and hold leaders accountable for development outcomes. Effective governance therefore, remains a critical factor in achieving sustainable community development.

The findings also revealed that empowerment and self-reliance accounted for 10.0% of the reviewed studies. This suggests that grassroots mobilisation contributes to building local capacity and enhancing communities' ability to manage their own development affairs. This finding aligns with Zimmerman's (2021) empowerment theory, which emphasizes the importance of enhancing individuals' and communities' control over resources and decision-making processes. Similarly, Abdullahi and Mohammed (2023) observed that community mobilisation initiatives improve local leadership capacity, increase self-confidence, and encourage proactive engagement in development activities. Although social transformation and inclusion accounted for only 4.0% of the reviewed studies, the finding remains significant because it highlights the long-term impact of grassroots mobilisation on social justice, equity, and inclusion. The result supports Freire's (1970) argument that participatory development promotes social transformation by empowering marginalized groups and enhancing their capacity to influence societal structures. The finding suggests that sustained grassroots mobilisation can help reduce social exclusion and promote inclusive development outcomes. Regarding institutional and structural factors influencing grassroots mobilisation, the findings showed that effective governance and leadership support emerged as the most frequently cited factor, accounting for 22.0% of the reviewed studies. This finding indicates that strong leadership and supportive governance structures are essential for successful mobilisation efforts. The result agrees with the work of Aghenta and Eke (2024), who found that transformational leadership enhances community participation and strengthens collective action. Similarly, Ugwuanyi and Nwosu (2025) reported that effective leadership promotes trust, coordination, and stakeholder engagement in community development initiatives. The study also found that financial resources accounted for 20.0% of the reviewed studies, underscoring the importance of adequate funding for mobilising resources and sustaining development interventions. This finding aligns with the observations of World Bank development reports, which consistently identify financial resources as critical determinants of community development success. The regression analysis provided empirical support for Hypothesis One, which stated that the mobilisation process leads to sustainable developmental outputs when supportive institutional environments exist. The regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.742$) and the significant p-value ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$) indicate a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between supportive institutional environments and sustainable community development outcomes. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected, while the alternative hypothesis was accepted. This finding confirms that grassroots mobilisation becomes more effective when supported by functional governance structures, institutional legitimacy, civic infrastructure, accountability mechanisms, and effective leadership. The finding supports North's (2021) argument that institutions shape development outcomes by providing the rules, norms, and structures that guide collective action.

3. Conclusion

The present systematic review of the literature has shown that grassroots mobilization cannot be conceptualized in terms of its inherent transformative nature and effectiveness. The ability of such movements to produce sustainable development is affected by numerous factors that enable and constrain them. Firstly, participatory governance can yield sustainable results only when supported by institutions; secondly, social capital needs to be invested in building through various channels. Thirdly, structural constraints, including resource shortages, volunteer burnout, and power imbalances, affect the most vulnerable communities. Fourth, the institutional capture process tends to deprive community participation of its political nature by translating radical demands into advisory information. Fifth, the issue of digital exclusion, another form of structural marginalization, is becoming prominent as governance migrates to the online space.

In terms of social work practice, the above discussion suggests that social work should shift from facilitating participation to structural advocacy. Social work practitioners require skills in building coalitions, resisting co-optation, and ensuring digital inclusion in addition to their existing skills in community organizing. Programs such as SWK 905 need to equip students with the skills to analyze institutional power dynamics, detect the threat of co-optation, and build the knowledge necessary to inform policy at all relevant levels. There needs to be greater emphasis on longitudinal research on mobilization outcomes, on intersectionality in social capital, and on scholarship from the global South.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Governments must go beyond mere rhetoric to provide community organizations with long-term funding and other resources, legal recognition, and the power to make decisions. Imposing community participation requirements on community groups without providing them with sufficient resources only exacerbates inequality; it does not alleviate it.
2. The focus should be on equity reviews of community engagement processes to unmask the structures that marginalize disadvantaged people. The construction of technological infrastructure should be a prerequisite for civic engagement, especially in rural areas and areas that are poor and technologically underserved.
3. Community practitioners need to engage in an asset-building approach, where the starting point is the community's identification of strengths and priorities, thereby minimising the threat of co-optation by institutions and ensuring that development occurs on community terms. Grassroots organizations should adopt a dual strategy that enables them to leverage institutional resources while retaining political autonomy.
4. Community development programs in social work training should include lessons on structural analysis, coalition building, co-optation resistance, and digital inclusion skills. Students should have the capacity not only to organize their communities but also to engage in the analysis of power relations, to fight against governance processes that claim participation without practicing it, and to form effective multi-sector coalitions.

5. Future studies should focus on longitudinal comparisons to establish whether short-term mobilization results in long-term sustainability outcomes. Researchers need to incorporate feminist and intersectional perspectives to study gender, class, and ethnicity in relation to access to mobilization. It is crucial for researchers to include non-English sources and literature from the Global South in their studies.



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