

YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS IN RURAL COMMUNITIES OF DELTA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study sought to investigate barriers to active youth participation in community development projects in rural communities of Delta State, Nigeria. A descriptive survey design was adopted for this study. The multistage sampling technique, consisting of simple random, purposive, systematic methods, was utilised. The sample size for the study was 320. The primary data for the study were collected from a structured questionnaire, which was pre-tested in a community that was not included in the study for consistency and reliability. School, farms, town halls, markets, borehole water, roads/paths, skill acquisition, and health centres were the community development projects executed in the study communities. The level of youth participation in the projects' development process was low as a result of inadequate inclusion of youth in the projects' selection, partisan politics, low education, inadequate information, inadequate funding, and relegation of youth's ideas. The study established that the males are more significantly involved in community development projects than female members. The need for professionalisation of social work and its inclusion in development efforts in Nigeria, amongst others were proffered.

Key words: Development projects; Nigeria; Participation; Rural communities; Youth

INTRODUCTION

Participation entails people involvement in projects' selection process, making of decision, execution, evaluation, and sharing in benefits of such programme/project (Regional Partnership for Resource Development [RPRD], 2009). According to Barasa and Jelagat (2013) participation has changed and enriched people in development-thinking by empowering them, strengthening and re-defining their commitment to development projects. Participation of target community members encourages expression of different views and identify how individual member can contribute towards attainment of the prioritized needs (Usadolo & Caldwell, 2016), and maintaining high levels of project sustainability in their communities (RPRD, 2009). This implies that youth participation in development process will enable them to contribute significantly to achieving their felt-needs, and attaining sustainability in the development projects. Youth participation in projects'/programmes' development process has the objectives of strengthening or building their capacities to attain their live aspirations, preventing and reducing socio-economic, political and cultural weaknesses, while enhancing their personal well-being (Udensi, et al., 2013).

According to Umeh and Odom (2011) youth is the period of transition, in one's life, from childhood into adulthood. For Liveright (2013), youth are persons within the age range of 13 years to 24 years, though, the age range varies from one country to the other (UN, 2008), based on the socio-economic, political, and cultural contexts of a nation. For instance, in Nigeria youth are seen as young persons within the age range of 16 years to 35 years (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2012). Globally, we have about 1.2 billion youth who are within the age range of 15 years to 24 years, out of these, about one billion of them are living in the developing nations (World Bank Report, 2010). NBS (2012) reports that about 50% of the population of the developing nations is young persons within the age range of 15 years to 35 years. In Nigeria, there are about 174,507,539 people, and out of this population, 64 million are youth; considering the numerical strength of the youth, and their ability as young persons, they can improve faster on the socio-economic of a nation, its leadership and security, thus, their participation in community development projects should be encouraged (Udensi, et al., 2013). However, most developing nations across the worlds, including Nigeria, are unable to integrate the youth into their development programmes (Olufemi, 2014).

Research such as, Umar and Mohammed (2014) in their study, discovered that revealed that the youth participated in areas of communal labour, provision of security and construction or maintenance of paths/roads in Damaturu Local Government Area of Yobe State. In conclusion, the study pointed out that youth involvement in development programmes is paramount, and it should be the focus in community development process. In addition, Mbagwu et al. (2016) found out that youth are the major facilitators of development programmes, when they are seen as not matured, problematic as against being resourceful and excluded from development process, it could result in their low participation. They identified not giving youth the encouragement to participate be actively in development projects, low educational level, parents' denial, lack of information about the projects, and lack of commitment by community leaders' exclusion of the youth from involvement in community development self-help projects as constraints to sustainability in development projects.

In addition, Mba and Onyesom (2020) revealed that youth participated in water projects, skills acquisition, sports, agriculture, education, building of markets, religion, and building of town halls. They identified poor planning of programme, tradition and culture, inadequate awareness, exclusion of youth at the planning stage, and bad government as constraining factors to active youth participation in community development projects, and also, political interference in decision-making process at the local or community level constrains people participation (Barasa & Jelagat, 2013). In spite of these hindrances to active youth participation and involvement in development process remains a right track for improving their welfare facilities across the rural communities (Olufemi, 2014). However, in all of these studies, youth participation in community development projects in rural communities of Delta State, Nigeria and its implications for community development policy have not been assessed and discussed.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

To bridge this gap in knowledge, as mentioned above, this study sought to:

1. Identify the development projects executed in Delta State, Nigeria.
2. Examine the stages of youth involvement in the development projects executed in the study area.
3. Explore the areas of the youth involvement in the development projects in the study communities.
4. Identify the factors, if any, hindering youth active involvement in the development projects in the study communities.

HYPOTHESIS

The following hypothesis was tested in this study:

1. The males are more significantly involved in community development projects than female members.

METHODS

A descriptive survey design was adopted for this study. The design was considered suitable because it assisted the researcher to collect primary data from a sample through questionnaires. This design was essential for this study for it is economical, and mindful of time limits. This study was conducted in rural communities of Delta Central Senatorial Zone of Delta State, Nigeria, which is one out of the three Senatorial Zones in the state. The study area is located in the fresh water forest. It is made up of eight local government areas. Namely: Ethiope East and West, Okpe, Sapele, Ughelli North and South, Udu, and Uvwie Local Government Areas. The population for this study includes all the communities in the Delta Central Senatorial Zone.

A multistage sampling technique, comprising simple random, purposive, systematic methods, was adopted. The simple random sampling method (by balloting) was used to select four Local Government Areas (Ughelli South, Ethiope East, Sapele, and Udu) and two communities (Egbo-Ideh and Okwagbe-Inland, Otorho-Abraka and Ovorie, Amukpe and Elume, and Otor-udu and Ubogo) were, respectively, purposively selected from each of the four chosen local government areas based on the presence of community development projects. Each of the selected communities was divided into four sections based on available number of compounds. Five households were systematically selected from each section, and two eligible respondents were chosen from every 4th household, resulting in a total of 40 respondents in each community. Thus, the total sample size was 320.

The major instrument for the primary data collection was a structured questionnaire, which was pre-tested in a community that was not included in the study for consistency and reliability. The questionnaire was administered by the researcher and two research assistants who were primary school teachers residing in the study area. The data collected were carefully edited to ensure completeness, consistency and accuracy, and the analysis was based on 300 questionnaires that were completely filled

and returned. The statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) was used for the analysis. In characterising the respondents, descriptive statistics such as percentages and frequency tables were utilised, and chi-square (χ^2) statistics was used to test the hypothesis. This enabled easier determination of the nature of relationships between the independent and dependent variables.

RESULTS

Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

The Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents that were of interest in this study include sex, age, and educational qualification. Details are clearly shown in Table 1:

Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Respondents (n = 300)

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	157	5.3
Female	143	47.7
Age range (in years)		
16 – 20	91	30.3
21 – 25	89	29.7
26 – 30	67	22.3
31 – 35	53	17.7
Educational qualification		
No Formal Education	57	19
FSLC	45	15
WASC/SSCE	66	22
ND/NCE	49	16.3
B.Sc./HND	58	19.3
Post Graduate	25	8.3

Source: Fieldwork, 2021

Table 1 shows that more than half of the respondents (51.3%) were males while 47.7 percent were females. Majority (30.3 %) were within the range of 16 – 20 years, and 29.7 percent were 21 – 25 years. Also, Table 1 shows that 22.3 percent were within the range of 26 – 30 years, and 17.7 percent were 31 – 35 years. 19 percent had not attained formal education, 15 percent had First School Leaving Certificate, 22 percent (majority) had West African School Certificate. Table 1 also shows that 16.3 percent, 19.3 percent, and 8.3 percent of the respondents had National Diploma/National Certificate of Education, Bachelor of Science/Higher National Diploma, and Post Graduate qualifications respectively.

Research Question One: What are the development projects executed in Delta State, Nigeria?

Table 2: Type of development projects executed by the youth (n = 300)

Type of projects	Yes	No
School	243 (81%)	77 (19%)
Farm	187 (62.3%)	113 (37.7%)
Town hall	268 (89.3%)	32 (10.7%)
Market	277 (92.3%)	23 (7.7%)
Borehole water	120 (40%)	180 (60%)
Roads/paths	234 (78%)	66 (22%)
Skill acquisition	51 (17%)	249 (83%)
Health centre	261 (87%)	39 (13%)

Source: Fieldwork, 2021

Table 2 shows that 81 percent of the respondents indicated that school projects were executed in their communities, 62.3 percent indicated farm, 89.3 percent said town hall, and majority (92.3%) said market. Also, table 2 above shows that 40 percent of the respondents indicated borehole water, while 78 percent, 17 percent, and 87 percent indicated roads/paths, skill acquisition, and health centre respectively. The most common community development projects in the study communities were market, town hall, health centre, and school.

Research Question Two: What are the stages of youth involvement in the development projects executed in the study area?

Table 3: Stages of youth involvement in the development projects (n = 300)

Stages of participation	Yes	No
Selection	76 (25.3%)	224 (74.7%)
Planning	121 (40.3%)	179 (59.7%)
Implementation	158 (52.7%)	142 (47.3%)
Monitoring	91 (30.3%)	209 (69.7%)
Evaluation	44 (14.7%)	256 (85.3%)

Source: Fieldwork, 2021

On stages of involvement of the respondents in the community development projects, Table 3 clearly indicates that 25.3 percent of the respondents participated in the projects' selection, 40.3 percent participated in planning, 52.7 percent participated in implementation, 30.3 percent were involved in monitoring, while 14.7 percent were involved in evaluation.

Research Question Three: What are the areas of the youth involvement in the development projects in the study communities?

Table 4: Areas of youth involvement in the development projects (n = 300)

Areas of participation	Yes	No
Provision of land	253 (84.3%)	47 (15.7%)
Provision of security	113 (37.7%)	187 (62.3%)
Financial contribution	137 (45.7%)	163 (54.3%)
Provision of labour	189 (63%)	111 (37%)
Provision of materials	36 (12%)	264 (88%)

Source: Fieldwork, 2021

Table 4 shows that 84.3 percent, of the respondents were involved in area of provision of land, 37.7 percent were involved in provision of security. Also, 45.7 percent were involved in financial contribution, while 63 percent and 12 percent said that they were involved in provisions of labour, and materials respectively. The majority of the respondents indicated that they were involved in the area of provision of land, followed by involvement in the area of provision of labour.

Research Question Four: What are the factors, if any, hindering youth active involvement in the development projects in the study communities?

Table 5: Distribution of respondents by reasons for non-participation at all times (n = 211)

Reason	Yes	No
Inadequate inclusion of the youth in projects' selection	124 (58.8%)	87 (41.2%)
Partisan politics	187 (88.6%)	24 (11.4%)
Low education	173 (82%)	38 (18%)
Inadequate information	181 (85.8%)	30 (14.2%)
Inadequate funding	125 (59.2%)	86 (40.8%)
Relegation of youth's ideas	105 (49.8%)	106 (50.2%)

Source: Fieldwork, 2021

Table 5 shows that 58.8 percent of those who did not participate in the projects at all times, indicated that it was due to inadequate inclusion of the youth in the projects' selection, 88.6 percent indicated partisan politics, and 82 percent said low education. In addition, Table 5 shows that 85.8 percent, 59.2 percent, and 49.8 percent said inadequate information, inadequate funding and relegation of youth's ideas respectively. Partisan politics ranked highest, and followed by inadequate information.

Hypothesis: The males are more significantly involved in community development projects than female members.

Table 6: Cross tabulation for test of the hypothesis

Sex	Level of participation			Total	χ^2 p-value
	Sometimes	Many times	All times		
Male	60 (20.0%)	43 (14.3%)	54 (18.0%)	157 (52.3%)	$\chi^2 = 6.106$, df = 2, p = .047
Female	51 (17.0%)	57 (19.0%)	35 (11.7%)	143 (47.7%)	
Total	111 (37.0%)	100 (33.3%)	89 (29.7%)	300 (100.0%)	

Source: Fieldwork, 2021

In Table 6 the hypothesis, which states that the males are more significantly involved in community development projects than female members, was tested with chi square (χ^2) statistics. A calculated chi square value of 6.106 was gotten at $p = .047$, showing that there is a significant relationship. Therefore, we reject the alternate hypothesis which states that the males are less significantly involved in community development projects than female members.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study found out that schools, farms, town halls, markets, boreholes water, roads/paths, skill acquisition, and health centres were the development projects executed in the study communities. This study also found out that all the youth participated in the development process of the projects, but at in different stages. More than half of them 158 (52.7%) participated at the projects' implementation stage. Other stages of their participation include project selection, planning, monitoring and evaluation. Also, this study found out that the youth participated in areas of provision of land, security, labour, materials and made financial contribution in the processes of the projects' implementation, and maintenance. This finding buttresses Mba and Onyesom (2020) and Umar and Mohammed (2014) who in their study found out that youth participated in water projects, skills acquisition, sports, agriculture, education, building of markets, religion, and building of town halls.

This study also found out that several factors prevented the youth from participating in the projects at all times (active participation). These factor include inadequate inclusion of youth in the projects selection, partisan politics, low education, inadequate information, inadequate funding, and relegation of youth's ideas. The finding is similar to Mba and Unisom's (2020) finding, which revealed that poor planning of programme, tradition and culture, inadequate awareness, exclusion of youth at the planning stage, and bad government constrained youth participation in community development process (Mba & Onyesom, 2020; Mbagwu, et. al., 2016), and buttresses Barasa and Jelagat's (2013) argument that political interference in decision-making process at the local or community level constrains people participation in community development programmes.

Furthermore, the study established that the males are more significantly involved in community development projects than female members. Gender roles are clearly defined in Africa, including Nigeria. There are certain roles that are more associated with males, while some others with females. Participation in community development projects tend to be associated with male youth believing that they are more on ground than the female counterparts who may go on marriage, in most cases, outside their communities.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, a descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. This study explored and assessed youth participation in the projects' development process in rural communities of Delta State, Nigeria. A multistage sampling technique, comprising simple random, purposive, systematic methods, was utilized. The primary data for the study were collected from a structured questionnaire. School, farm, town hall, market, borehole water, roads/paths, skill acquisition, and health centre were the development projects executed in the communities. The level of youth participation in the projects was low as a result of inadequate inclusion of youth in the projects selection, partisan politics, low education; inadequate information, inadequate funding, and relegation of youth's ideas. The study established that the males are more significantly involved in community development projects than female members.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the foregoing, the following recommendations are made, to further enhance active involvement of community members, particularly the youth, in development projects in rural communities of Delta State, Nigeria, and elsewhere:

1. All tiers of government, and development agencies should formulate development policies that create enabling environments for youth to actively get involved in community development process across the rural communities of Delta, and Nigeria, in general.
2. There is need to professionalize social work in Nigeria. This will enable professional social workers, in collaboration with other human development professionals, to create awareness on the need for inclusive participation in programmes/projects in order to make them sustainable across the study communities and Nigeria in general.
3. There is need for government to create enabling environment, through community development policies, that will improve on youth skill acquisition programmes in the rural communities of the Delta Central Senatorial Zone of Delta State, Nigeria. This will empower the youth and other members of the communities to participate actively in community development activities.

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