

# Achieving Sustainable Community Development Projects Through Community Participation in Rivers State, Nigeria

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## Abstract

This study examined the extent to which community participation was used in the achievement of sustainable community development projects in Rivers State, Nigeria. Two research questions and one null hypothesis guided the study. The descriptive survey research design was adopted in the study, with a population of 1111 respondents comprising community leaders and youth members in two local government areas of the state. The sample of 333 respondents made up of 116 community leaders and 217 youth members was drawn from the study population using the stratified random sampling technique. An 18- item structured questionnaire weighted on a 4-point rating scale was the data collecting instrument that was used in the study and validated by two expert colleagues in adult education. The reliability index of .89 was obtained in a test-retest method using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. The research questions were answered using the means and the t-test statistic was used to test the null hypothesis at the probability level of 5%. Findings of the study showed that community participation was rarely felt in community development projects in Rivers State as their inputs are most often not sought before embarking on projects. The study further identified as some of the contributing factors to community participation in community development projects in Rivers State as high rate of poverty, ignorance, lack of transparency and corruption. The null hypothesis was accepted, an indication that significant difference was not found between the mean responses of community leaders and youth members regarding the extent to which community participation has contributed in the achievement of sustainable community development projects in Rivers State. It was recommended among others that community members should be represented in the planning and implementation of projects in the state.

**Keywords:** Community Participation, Sustainability, Empowerment, Human Capacity Development

## 1. Introduction

Community participation is a concept that tends to bring different stakeholders together for problem solving and decision making. Putnam (2000) refers to it as peoples engagement within the community that play an essential and long standing role in promoting quality of life. This definition sees community participation as the involvement of people in a community in projects to solve their own projects with little or no external assistance for enhanced standard of living. Thwala (2010) explains that for community participation to be successful, project must include special components such as recruiting villagers in all phases of designing, implementing, monitoring, supervising and evaluating the project. Recruiting villagers within the context of this study entails engaging the community members' in the identification of their felt needs through several forms of interaction, approaches toward achieving these needs, and strategies to sustaining them. This recruitment is characterised by the active involvement of community members in addressing their needs.

Ordinarily, community participation is difficult to state. The social, economic, educational and other conditions of a community differ from those of other communities; as such their forms and degrees of involvement in development activities vary. It is therefore a continuum of involvement of people in decision making processes, in implementing programmes, sharing in benefits of development programmes and their involvement in efforts to evaluate such programmes. Okafor (2005) concluded that when communities participate in their own project, the following are usually observed:

- i. Empowering community improves efficiency
- ii. Local participation yields better projects, better outcomes
- iii. Greater transparency and accountability enhances service delivery
- iv. It also encourages donor harmonisation.

Consequently, Aref and Ma'Rof, (2008) identified some concepts as prominent in the definition of community participation to include participation, empowerment and capacity building.

World Bank (2004) sees participation as an important determinant in project performance and sustainability. It further stated that for it to be effective, it must respect peoples knowledge, skills and empower them to take control of their lives by focusing on training, resources, and supporting them to make their own decisions. Participation is seen as a way of reducing the risk on project failures and the cost of risk on the project. It is aimed at actively involving the communities in the identification of problems, formulation of plans and

implementation of decisions over their lives. This statement is in cognisance with Oakley's (1989) observation that rural development project will benefit from more direct participation by the local people. Thus, the World Bank (2004) summarises that participation is conceived as a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives, the decisions and resources which affect them.

However, participation is seen in two perspectives as a means or as an end. As a means, participation is a vehicle directed at achieving pre-determined goals. These goals may not be in congruent with the needs of the people, as such make participation passive and static. As an end, participation is seen as a vehicle that recognises the direct involvement of the people in shaping, deciding and taking part in the developmental process. It is 'bottom- top' oriented. Unlike the former which is 'top- bottom', participation as an end entails a process of achieving greater individual fulfillment, personal development, self-awareness and some form of immediate satisfaction. The characteristic feature of this type of participation is that people are given the chance to 'formulate' their own development, to influence or to 'have a say' in the decision making process regarding the programme or project initiated for them. Olukontun (2008) buttressing this type of participation observed that development is meaningless if it does not harness the potential of the beneficiaries who are the primary stakeholders. It is therefore the active involvement of these primary stakeholders in project of their own that sustainability in community development project is achieved.

Empowerment as a component of community participation is seen as a continuous process whereby individuals and/or communities gain the confidence, self-esteem, understanding and power necessary to articulate their concern, ensures that actions are taken to address them and more broadly, gain control over their lives (Schuftain, 1996). Eade and Rowlands (2003) stipulate that empowerment is a measure of people's capacity to bring about change, which is concerned with analysing and addressing the dynamics of oppressions and assisting groups and individual to play an active role in decisions which affect their lives. This concept goes beyond participation and hence, is conceived as a process by which the people are able to organise and influence changes on the basis of their access to knowledge and decision making processes. Zuofa (2008) sees empowerment as a process whereby authority is given to an individual or group to take a particular self fulfilling course of action. Throwing more light on the term, Adams (1996) notes that empowerment is the means by which individuals, groups and/or communities become able to take control of their circumstances and achieve their own goals, thereby being able to work towards helping themselves and others to maximise the quality of their lives. Hence, the World Bank (2002) refers to empowerment as the expansion of freedom of choice and action. It recognises the coming together of the people as an avenue towards which they can interact as to improve their lives and subsequently sustain projects conceived by themselves.

Capacity building as a component of community participation is a mechanism that enables local people to determine their own values, priorities and act on their decisions. Eade (1997) sees capacity building as enabling institutions to be more effective and efficient in the process of identifying, implementing, monitoring and the evaluation of development projects. It is therefore an approach to community development that raises people's knowledge, awareness and skills to use their own capacity and, using available support systems, to resolve the more underlying causes of underdevelopment (Schuftan, 1996). Thus, capacity building is a vehicle that promotes the well being of the people through their collective involvement in decision making. It also presupposes the sustainability of their outcome that is obtained through collective decision. Sustainability as relates to this study is the capacity of an organisation to preserve and maintain projects of their own by becoming self-supporting.

Consequently, community participation is conceived as a tool capable of increasing the efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of community development projects. Projects are executed with direct involvement of the direct beneficiaries; and because of their involvement in the planning and implementation, they tend to sustain them. This study therefore sets to determine the extent of community participation in the achievement of sustainability of community development projects in Rivers State.

## **2. Statement of the Problem**

Several writers have come to agree that genuine community participation increases the efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of development projects in a community. It recognises the direct involvement of beneficiaries in the planning and at the implementation stages. Yet most development projects in Rivers State do not stem from the people's aspiration and initiation as such, lack their active participation. The absence of the people's involvement in these development projects is manifested in frequent vandalisation of the projects in the state. This has informed the researchers to critically examine the extent of community participation in the sustainability of community development projects in Rivers State of Nigeria, and to identify the possible factors that constrain the sustainability of these projects in the state.

## **3. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to ascertain the extent of community participation in the achievement of

sustainable community development projects in Rivers State of Nigeria. Specifically the study sought to:

- (1) Determine the extent to which community participation has contributed in the achievement of sustainable community development projects in Rivers State.
- (2) Determine the factors that constrain community participation in the attainment of sustainable community development projects in Rivers State.

#### 4. Research Questions

In a bid to achieve these objectives, the following research questions are posed in the study:

1. To what extent has community participation contributed in the achievement of sustainable community development projects in Rivers State?
2. What are the factors that constrain community participation from achieving sustainable community development projects in Rivers State?

#### 5. Hypothesis

A null hypothesis is formulated in this study and tested at .05 level of significance.

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of community leaders and those of youths regarding the extent to which community participation has contributed in the achievement of sustainable community development projects in Rivers State.

#### 6. Methodology

Descriptive survey research design was adopted in the study. Two local government areas in Rivers State were used as the area of the study. These included: Ogba Egbema Ndoni and Port Harcourt City Local Government Areas. The choice of these two local government areas is because it was believe to serve as a proxy for the community. It also represented the voice of the people having witnessed a variety of projects. The community leaders as referred in this study as those of Community Development Committees (CDC), while the youths are those recognised as existing bodies in the local government areas. The population for the study was 1111 respondents made up of 387 community leaders and 724 youth members drawn from randomly selected six (three each) communities from the local government areas. The sample of the study was 333 respondents (30% of the population). This comprised 116 community leaders and 217 youth members. The stratified random sampling technique was employed in the selection of the respondents. Questionnaire on Achieving Sustainable Community Development Projects through Community Participation was the data collecting instrument. It contained an 18- item question structured on a four point scale weighted as strongly agree (4-points), agree (3-points), disagree (2-points) and strongly disagree (1-point). The instrument was subjected to face validity by two validates in adult education. A reliability coefficient value of .89 was obtained through a test- retest method. The mean of descriptive statistics and t-test of inferential statistics were used in analysing data generated from the respondents in Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Criterion mean of 2.50 was used to accept an item in the questionnaire. The extent of classification of participation was presented as follows:

- 3.50-4.00 Very high extent
- 2.50-3.49 High extent
- 2.00-2.49 Low extent
- 1.50-1.99 Very low extent

Significant difference was not found if the t-calculated value is less than the t-critical value at .05 level of significance, but significant difference was found if the t-calculated value is greater than the t-critical value at .05 level of significance.

#### 7. Results

1. To what extent has community participation contributed in the achievement of sustainable community development projects in Rivers State?

**Table 1.1: Mean ratings of respondents on the extent of community participation in sustainability of community development projects**

|    | Statement   | CDC<br>(n=116) | Youths<br>(n=217) | Decision                       |
|----|---|----------------|-------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. | Meetings are held between external bodies and community as a way of informing them on projects to be embarked upon. | 2.43           | 2.47              | *Disagreed<br>**Disagreed      |
| 2. | The people are trained on their roles toward project execution.   | 1.90           | 2.36              | *Disagreed<br>**Disagreed      |
| 3. | Communities are actively involved in decision making process relating to implementation of projects.                | 1.89           | 2.56              | *Disagreed<br>**Agreed         |
| 4. | Participation of community is more of informative.  | 3.03           | 2.86              | *Agreed<br>**Agreed            |
| 5. | Ideas and suggestions are usually sought from community members before embarking on projects.                       | 2.31           | 2.20              | *Disagreed<br>**Disagreed      |
| 6. | Grassroots are often told of what they want to do by external bodies.   | 1.78           | 2.65              | *Disagreed<br>**Agreed         |
| 7. | Projects are run without listening to local people's opinions.  | 2.81           | 2.81              | *Agreed<br>**Agreed            |
| 8. | Groups are formed to ensure the sustainability of project.  | 2.12           | 2.29              | *Disagreed<br>**Disagreed      |
| 9. | Local people have control over all development projects without any external force.                                 | 1.85           | 2.33              | *Disagreed<br>**Disagreed      |
|    | <b>Cluster mean</b>   | <b>2.24</b>    | <b>2.50</b>       | <b>*Disagreed<br/>**Agreed</b> |

*\*represents community development committee (C.D.C) and \*\*represents youths*

Table 1.1 indicates that items 1(2.43, 2.47), 2(1.90, 2.36), 5(2.31, 2.20), 8(2.12, 2.29) and 9(1.85, 2.33) are rated as low extent for community development committee and youths respectively. Items 3(1.89, 2.56) and 6(1.78, 2.65) have varying mean scores with those of community development committee rated as very low extent while those of youths were high extent. Items 4 and 7 have mean scores of high extent (3.03, 2.86) and (2.81, 2.81) for community development committee and youths respectively. The grand mean of low extent (2.24) for community development committee and high extent (2.50) for youths is an indication that the extent of community participation in community development projects in Rivers State was low.

2. What are the factors that constrain community participation from achieving sustainable community development projects in Rivers State?

**Table 2.1: Mean ratings of respondents on factors that constrain community participation from achieving sustainable community development projects**

| S/N | Statement  | CDC<br>(n=116) | Youths<br>(n=217) | Remarks                   |
|-----|--|----------------|-------------------|---------------------------|
| 10. | Ignorance resulting from lack of information.  | 3.03           | 2.92              | *Agreed<br>**Agreed       |
| 11. | Low level of education by majority of the people.  | 2.37           | 2.97              | *Disagreed<br>**Agreed    |
| 12. | High level of poverty.   | 3.04           | 3.01              | *Agreed<br>**Agreed       |
| 13. | Lack of transparency and accountability among community leaders on funds contributed for development projects. | 2.53           | 2.68              | *Agreed<br>**Agreed       |
| 14. | Poor leadership by some community leaders.   | 2.54           | 2.98              | *Agreed<br>**Agreed       |
| 15. | Poor involvement of community members in development projects.   | 2.69           | 2.53              | *Agreed<br>**Agreed       |
| 16. | Lack of direct benefit from what is executed.  | 2.10           | 2.07              | *Disagreed<br>**Disagreed |
| 17. | Grassroots are not skillful.   | 2.19           | 2.22              | *Disagreed<br>**Disagreed |
| 18. | Lack of interest resulting from overdependence by external bodies.   | 2.15           | 2.16              | *Disagreed<br>**Disagreed |
|     | <b>Cluster mean</b>  | <b>2.52</b>    | <b>2.62</b>       | <b>*Agreed</b>            |

*\*represents community development committee (C.D.C) and \*\*represents youths*

Data on table 2.1 show that items 10, 12, 13, 14, and 15 have mean scores of (3.03, 2.92), (3.04, 3.01), (2.53, 2.68), (2.54, 2.98) and (2.69, 2.53) rated as agreed for community development committee and youths respectively. Item 11 has the mean score of disagreed (2.37) for community development committee, but agreed (2.97) for youths accepted. Items 16, 17 and 18 have the mean scores of (2.10, 2.07), (2.19, 2.22) and (2.15, 2.16) rated as disagreed for community development committee and youths respectively. The grand mean of high extent (2.52, 2.62) for both community development committee and the youths reveal that ignorance, high level of poverty, corruption among some community leaders and poor leadership are some the factors that constrained community participation from achieving sustainable community development projects in Rivers State.

**Ho<sub>1</sub>:** There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of community leaders and those of youths regarding the extent to which community participation has contributed in the achievement of sustainable community development projects in Rivers State.

**Table 3.1 : t-test analysis of significant difference between community leaders and youths with regard to components of community participation in development projects in Rivers State.**

| Category | No. of Respondents | $\bar{X}$ | S.D  | Df  | t-cal | t-crit | Remark   |
|----------|--------------------|-----------|------|-----|-------|--------|----------|
| C.D.C    | 116                | 2.23      | 0.23 |     |       |        |          |
| Youths   | 217                | 2.50      | 0.28 | 331 | -8.96 | 1.96   | Accepted |

We accept the null hypothesis that significant difference is not found in the mean ratings of community leaders and those of youths regarding the extent to which community participation has contributed in the achievement of sustainable community development projects, Rivers State with the calculated t-value (-8.96) less than the t-critical value (1.96) at .05 level of significance.

## 7. Discussion of Results

Result of findings in research question one indicated that the extent of community participation in the sustainability of community development projects in Rivers State was low. Respondents revealed that meetings were not held with the contractors as a well of informing them about the projects. It is not surprising that participation was more of informative, as projects were aimed at achieving the predetermined objectives of the awarding bodies. Thus, Thwala (2010) explained that for community participation to be successful, projects must include special components such as recruiting and villagers in all phases of designing, implementing, monitoring,



supervision and evaluating the project. Stressing on the importance of active participation of the community, the World Bank (2004) stipulates that it is an important determination in project performance and sustainability that demands the peoples' knowledge, skills and empowers them to take control of the lives and also make their own decisions.

In research question two, result of findings revealed that there are several factors that constrained community participation from achieving sustainable community development projects in Rivers State. These factors included ignorance of members of the community, high level of poverty and corruption of some community leaders. The non-sustainability of most the community development projects in Rivers State was characterised by corruption of most community leaders in the non use of quality materials by contractors, close monitoring and supervision of projects, and lack of maintenance by the community. The finding is in congruence with Okafor (2005) who contended that when the communities participate in their own project, there is normally greater transparency and accountability which enhances service delivery. Olukotun (2008) added that development is meaningless, if it does not harness the potential of the beneficiaries who are the primary stakeholders.

The null hypothesis was accepted, indicating that significant difference was not found in the mean ratings of community leaders and those of youths regarding the extent to which community participation has contributed in the achievement of sustainable community development projects in Rivers State. The existence of no significant difference by both respondents was attributable to the fact that they share similar views on the items of the questionnaire regarding the extent of community participation in the achievement of sustainable community development projects in the state.

## 8. Conclusion

The extent of community participation in community development projects in Rivers State was low; as such development projects were mostly not sustained. Community participation should be seen as a veritable tool for the sustainability of community development projects. The direct involvement of beneficiaries in the planning and execution of projects significantly contributes to the long lasting of project. Several factors were identified as constraining the sustainability of community development projects in Rivers State. These factors included ignorance, high level of poverty within the locality, lack of transparency and accountability among community leaders especially on funds made available for development projects, poor leadership, poor involvement of community members in development projects, corruption and lack of maintenance culture.

## 9. Recommendations

To ensure the sustainability of any project in the state, the researchers articulated the following as recommendations:

1. Different organs that make up the community should evenly be represented in the planning and execution of any development project.
2. External bodies or organisation agencies should accept valuable contributions of ideas and suggestions of direct stakeholders for the effective execution of projects.
3. Programmes capable of empowering the rural dwellers should be established as a way of curbing their poverty level.
4. To ensure the sustainability of the project, groups as well as communities should be charged with the responsibility of managing and maintaining such projects.
5. Sensitisation campaigns should be carried in the community by the government on the need to protect and safe guard projects cited in their locality.

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