

Community Engagement and Participation in the Implementation of Community Development Projects in Lagos State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study seeks to highlight how community participation and engagement could influence a community development project and the challenges faced, especially in Lagos State where there are many abandoned projects and community development associations. The study adopted a descriptive design to have a full perspective. Data was collected through close ended questionnaires from 10 Community Development Association (CDA) members. Two hundred and eight (208) respondents were selected through a purposive sampling technique to ensure community members are selected from rural and sub-urban CDAs in seven local governments out of the twenty local governments in Lagos State and the data were analyzed with frequency and chi square tests. The study found that community engagement empowers communities to have their say over decisions that affect their lives; community projects are made easier through community development agency participation and lack of qualified professionals in the community affects participation in community development projects. CDAs are encouraged to participate and engage in any project within their jurisdictions. The study therefore recommended the community member to participate actively and discuss with the project financiers before the commencement of projects for their community. Consequently, the study concluded that community participation and engagement encourages the community to claim project ownership.

Keywords: Community Development Associations, community engagement, community participation, community projects development

1. Introduction

Community development has existed in developing nations like Nigeria for a long time, despite the fact that it has been practiced knowingly or unknowingly. It started when people came together to clear bushes to make a pathway to bringing resources together to build houses for themselves and community recreational centres. Despite all these being done without formal recognition and with less mobilization efforts, society had more achievements with fewer abandoned projects. With different authors defining community development in Nigeria, most definitions refer to it as the process where local communities actively identify and address their needs, leading to sustainable socio-economic growth. This participatory approach ensures that development projects align with each community's unique cultural, social and economic contexts.

According to Oyeleye *et al.* (2018), community development involves efforts on the part of the people in a community. This effort is shown in the active participation of the people in the program designed for their well-being in their community. This participation may take the form of expenditure of time, energy, financial and physical resources. It also involves the resources of some outside authority, governmental or non-governmental, by which the community must manage to solve their community problems. The significant goals of community development, according to Ekong (2002), cited in Oyeleye *et al.* (2018), are to induce social change to balance human and material betterment, for strengthening the institutional structure in such a way as to facilitate social change and the process of growth; to ensure the fullest possible popular participation in the development process and promote social justice by permitting less privileged groups to give expressions to the aspirations and to participate in development activities. The definition did not include who the less privileged groups are and what made them such in their country or area.

Moreover, it is recognized that development efforts cannot be sustained without the active participation of all people concerned without regard to gender, age or wealth. This is because the participation process, to a considerable extent, is determined by, among other things, the institutional structure of decision-making and implementation and the orientation of people. Such institutional structures and orientations grow and crystallize in a society over a long period. Wordu (2018) defines community participation as the involvement of community members in activities designed to improve their condition and better their community. It is often seen as citizen participation in the community project. It is a process by which citizens respond to public concerns and take responsibility for the development of their community. It is a process whereby the marginalized in a community take the initiative to determine their future and improve their lives with full responsibility for their needs and assert themselves as subjects of their history.

Community engagement is primarily part of a dialogue where organizations and communities can make decisions to create social capital. It can lead to improved outcomes for communities when government organizations and public decision-making entities seek out the aspirations, concerns and values of communities, who, in turn, share their aspirations, concerns and values with governing entities. Community engagement ensures access and community empowerment are done through the values of access and inclusivity, where community members are informed and educated on issues at hand, locals are able to contribute meaningfully to engagement and have the capacity to shape those activities. Community engagement ensures that community members have access to valued social settings and activities, feel that they are able to contribute meaningfully to those activities, and develop functional capabilities that enable them to participate fully.

Scholars such as Lee (2021), Obeta & Okide (2011), Green (2008) & Wordu (2019) have suggested so many approaches to participation and engagement such as top-bottom approach, bottom-top approach, participatory rural approach and technology of participation, economic theory and community-driven development (CDD) approaches of community development. While all these approaches try to handle development projects from different angles, there are still some gaps left behind. Hence, despite all these approaches being used in various developing countries, there are still many abandoned community development projects in the nooks and crannies of highly populated cities like Lagos State.

Ayodele & Alabi (2011) submitted that Nigeria is characterized by lots of abandoned community development projects due to lack of coordination from the community, urbanization, poor infrastructures and roads. Consequently, residents of major cities, especially Lagos State, living in erosion-prone areas have to leave their houses because of flooding and fear of reptiles. Some school buildings have been abandoned due to neglect by successive governments which has turned them into hideouts for criminals and cultists. The causes and effects of these project abandonments are not just peculiar to a particular reason but rather cut across several reasons (Ayodele & Alabi, 2011), as well as creating a total dwindling effect on the values of developed properties located nearby and within the vicinity. Most of this abandoned residential building usually turned into hide-outs for criminals and has a tremendous effect on the physical environment, poses a serious threat to the sustainability of the environment and attracting the most hopeless of any city's destitute population. Hence, this represents a set-back in developing the community to the fullest.

1.1. Statement of Problem of the Study

Community participation and engagement is of absolute importance when it comes to community development success. This is to ensure that all the major stakeholders in the community are not left behind in the development project. With scholars having different approaches to participation and engagement in records, there have been lots of abandoned community development project due to lack of coordination from the community, urbanization, poor infrastructures, and roads in major cities like Lagos and these questions the various approaches. Moreover, the level of community involvement in the planning, financing, execution, operation and management of community development projects is still in doubt in some communities. Without detailed assessment of the effectiveness of community engagement and participation, it is difficult to justify the extent to which they have been utilized in

community development projects. Hence, it is important to research the influence of community engagement and participation in the implementation of community development projects. It is also imperative to look at the challenges faced by the community members in implementing various projects. Consequently, it is the thrust of this study to examine the community engagement and participation in the implementation of community development project in Lagos State.

1.2. Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives are to:

1. assess the influence of community engagement in the implementation of community development projects in Lagos State
2. determine the influence of community participation in the implementation of community development projects in Lagos State
3. identify various challenges of the community in the implementation of community development projects in Lagos State.

1.3. Research Questions

1. What is the influence of community engagement in the implementation of community development projects in Lagos State?
2. What is the influence of community participation in the implementation of community development projects in Lagos state?
3. What are the challenges community members are confronted with in the implementation of community development projects in Lagos state?

1.4. Research Hypotheses

H₀ 1: There is no significant influence of community engagement on the implementation of community developments project in Lagos state.

H₀ 2: Community participation does not significantly influence the implementation of community developments project in Lagos state.

H₀ 3: There are no significant influence of community challenges in the implementation of community development projects in Lagos State.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Concept of Community Development

The United Nations defines community development as a process whereby community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems. It is a broad concept, applied to the practices of civic leaders, activists, involved citizens and professionals to improve various aspects of communities, typically aiming to build stronger and more resilient local communities. Lee (2021) stated that community development is rooted in a broad understanding of citizenship that sees people as having a right to influence and participate in the decisions that affect them and to have their experiences and views listened to and acted on. It is potentially a means or process whereby people can achieve such a right. This means that for us to develop as a nation, there is a need to ensure that every aspect is developed. This will ensure that no sector is left unattended to and everyone will unanimously bring about the desired development.

In the opinion of Obeta & Okide (2011), the approach to delivering community development and social welfare services has been changing from time to time over the past three decades. Presently, a bottom-top service delivery approach is in vogue. The approach implies that the beneficiaries of a service are helped to understand their problems and take part in suggesting and providing possible interventions towards solving that particular problem. In other words, bottom-top service delivery approach is a demand-driven approach showing that communities are helped to identify a problem affecting them and, hence, the need to solve it. Rather than imposing development projects on the community, its members should be allowed to participate right from planning and execution of projects. The bottom-top approach contrasts sharply with the top-bottom approach where the bureaucrats thought over problems for the communities and suggested interventions on their behalf. The top-bottom approach presupposes that communities have no capacity to understand their problems and nor do they have any capacity to suggest any meaningful intervention to solve their problems (Obetta & Okide, 2011). This type of approach became very popular during the colonial and post-colonial era up to the 1980s. The top bottom approach had shortcomings as their services did not meet the communities' needs. Also, the communities had to look at the interventions as foreign and impositions on them.

2.2. Concept of Community Participation

Wordu (2018) defines community participation as the involvement of community members in activities designed to improve their condition and better their community. It is often seen as citizen participation in the community project. It is a process by which citizens respond to public concerns and take responsibility for the development of their community. It is a process whereby the marginalized in a community take the initiative to determine their future and improve their lives with full responsibility for their needs and assert themselves as subjects of their history. According Wordu (2018), community participation is concerned about:

- a. The involvement of people in cooperative projects to improve their living conditions
- b. Involvement of people in the activities to acquire skills that enable them to adjust to changing realities and
- c. Involvement of people in public issues which grow out of individual or local interests.

Viewing community participation in the context of community-based organizations, Wordu (2018) suggests that community participation is driven by local residents interested in increasing the visibility of perceived neighborhood threats and defending their rights. It is a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources that affect them.

2.3. Concept of Community Engagement

According to Weil, Reisch & Ohmer (2021), community engagement is the involvement and participation in an organization for the welfare of the community. It is volunteering, which involves giving personal time to projects in humanitarian NGOs or religious groups, are forms of community involvement. The engagement is generally motivated by values and ideals of social justice. Community engagement can be volunteering at food banks, homeless shelters, emergency assistance programs, neighborhood cleanup programs and so forth. Community engagement is a community-centered orientation based in dialogue. Community engagement enables a more contextualized understanding of community members' perceptions of the topics and contexts, and facilitates stronger relationships among and between community members. The outcome of community engagement is ultimately social capital and stronger relational networks. While community organizing involves the process of building a grassroots movement involving communities, community engagement primarily deals with the practice of moving communities toward change, usually from a stalled or similarly suspended position.

2.4. Community Engagement, Community Participation and Community Development

Granicus (2023) opined that with the rise in deepening and expanding public engagement globally, the importance of community engagement has become pivotal for well-functioning, twenty-first century democracies. Constructive relationships between communities and the institutions of government make community engagement not only desirable, but necessary and viable as it is likely to lead to more equitable, sustainable public decisions and improve the liveability of local communities. This is why community engagement is important for individuals, public organizations, and governments alike. Where traditional, executive-led approaches are ineffective, community engagement is important in its collaborative approach to the design and/or delivery of services. For the complexity of issues in any given community where traditional approaches have been ineffective if non-inclusive in the extreme, community engagement enables better understanding of communities' needs and aspirations.

Granicus (2023) further submitted that community engagement builds and sustains cohesive communities. It is primarily part of a dialogue where organizations and communities can make decisions to create social capital. Community engagement leads to improved outcomes. It can lead to improved outcomes for communities when government organizations and public decision-making entities seek out the aspirations, concerns and values of communities, who, in turn, share their aspirations, concerns and values with governing entities. Incorporated into decision-making processes, public decision makers are better informed and better able to meet community needs.

Olukotun (2017) opined that community engagement drives social transformation. With an emphasis on collaboration and the promise of influence on decision making, the importance of community engagement is clear as it drives social transformation. It promotes advocacy that not only works to raise awareness, but passionate, locally-informed voices can be heard – especially during election time. As voters, communities have the power to make their voices heard. And elections represent a significant opportunity to drive change. Advocacy campaigns are at their most effective when local governments, municipalities and councils activate communities, mobilizing on issues that impact their everyday lives. For it is in the local, placed-based arena that community members can have their most direct impact on policy. Traditionally, local government advocacy priorities have been determined by executive-led approach essentially, without community input (and often buoyed by third-party research and data at times, leading to advocacy campaigns that worked to benefit external agencies).

Olukotun (2017) submitted that community participation in project development is about ordinary citizens assessing needs and participating in project planning and budgeting, implementation and monitoring. This improves public resource management and reduces corruption. Thus, making civil servants and political leaders accountable to the people. The exemption of weak and powerless citizens from decision making is one of the causes of poverty, most especially in Nigeria because it denies them their rights and creates unequal power relationship. Mongbala (2003) indicated that community members are easily mobilized to participate in community development programmes through the agency for community-based association. The community-based association in the short period of time can mobilize a large ring of community members to participate in community development programmes.

2.5. Challenges of Community Engagement and Participation

Gboku & Lekoko (2016) noted that one of the factors affecting the utilization of community engagement for community development project implementation is poor participation by the people resulting from the fact that majority of the community members are not involved in the planning and implementation of community development projects. The resultant effect is that community resources utilization process is faced with lack of co-operation by the members of the community. It has also been reported that the utilization of community participation for community development projects is also faced with the problem of personnel skilled and unskilled labour, non-availability of expertise as well as mismanagement of community resources by some people.

According to Asuka and Pully (2008), the dearth of skilled, qualified and competent manpower in the various communities, especially in executive capacity, affects projects execution and frequently ends in abandoned projects. Executive capacity involves those professional and experts such as agronomists, medical consultants, engineers, architects, accountants, and policy analysts, among others who are needed for project execution. These experts and other skilled manpower are in short supply in most communities, thereby limiting the possibility of project execution and ultimately ending up in an abandoned project. It has also been submitted that another factor that has led to the ineffective utilization of community participation is the issue of corruption. This is usually perpetrated by politicians, contractors and local communities through outright embezzlement of project funds or misappropriation of funds or through over invoicing of project materials and equipment. In all the cases, the consequence is abandoned projects occasioned mainly by the depletion of projects funds caused by corrupting tendencies of actors and stakeholders.

3. Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive research design to obtain adequate information from the concerned Community Development Association (CDA) members in Lagos State. Two hundred and eight (208) respondents were selected from 10 CDAs through a random sampling technique among the 639 CDA members in Lagos State. The chosen CDAs are in rural and sub-urban parts of Lagos State and they cut across seven Local Government Areas (LGA) out of the twenty LGAs in Lagos state. This was done to ensure that major community members were captured and to generalize the study. A self-constructed questionnaire with a modified Likert four-point scale was used to obtain data from the different community development associations in different areas in Lagos state. The questionnaire was drafted in English since most of the respondents have graduated from O-level at least. Face and content validity of the instrument were done, while the Pearson product moment correlation co-efficient was used to check the reliability of the instrument and 0.86 was obtained at a coefficient of 0.05. The result was analyzed with simple percentages to answer research questions raised and Chi square was used for hypotheses formulated at 0.05 significant level.

4. Results



Figure 1: Community Development; source: Authors

Research Question One: What is the influence of community engagement in the implementation of community development projects in Lagos State?

The findings on research question one as presented in Table 1 and show the influence of community engagement on community development project in Lagos State. The finding shows that community engagement influences the involvement of the community member in the development of their community, deals with the practice of moving communities toward change, empowers communities to have their say over decisions that affect their lives and builds and sustains cohesive communities. Hence, the success of the community development project relies on community engagement and other factors as shown in Figure 1 above.

Research Question Two: What is the influence of community participation in the implementation of community development projects in Lagos State?

The findings on research question two as presented in Table 1 and Figure 1 above and show the influence of community participation on community development projects in Lagos State. The finding shows that community participation influences monitoring of the project by the community member made the project easier through community development agency and it is about assessing needs and planning of important task. Hence, the completion of the community development project relies on community participation and other factors as shown in Figure 1 above.

Research Question Three: What are the challenges community members are confronted with in the implementation of community development projects in Lagos State?

The findings on research question three as presented in Table 1 and show some of the challenges confronting community members in the implementation of community development projects in Lagos State. The finding shows poor participation by the community members, lack of qualified professionals in the community, corruption and fund limitations are the major challenges facing the community members.

4.1. Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis (%)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	n	p
1. There is no significant influence of community participation on the implementation of community developments project in Lagos State.	8.2	23.1	27.9	40.9	208	<0.05
Hypothesis 2: Community participation doesn't significantly influence the implementation of community developments project in Lagos State	13.0	26.9	24.0	36.1	208	<0.05
Hypothesis 3: There are no significant influence of community challenges in the implementation of community development projects in Lagos State	9.6	7.7	43.3	39.4	208	<0.05

Table 1: Hypothesis Testing; source: Original Research

Table 1 above demonstrates the hypothesis testing process. It was found that all three null hypotheses could be rejected and that, therefore, the alternative hypotheses are accepted.

5. Discussion of Findings

Findings from research question one and hypothesis one show that respondents opined that community engagement is the involvement of the community member in the development of their community, which primarily deals with the practice of moving communities toward change, usually from similarly suspended position and empowers communities to have their say over decisions that affect their lives. This is in line with Lee (2021) in that community development is rooted in a broad understanding of

citizenship that sees people as having a right to influence and participate in the decisions that affect them and to have their experiences and views listened to and acted on. It is potentially a means or process whereby people can achieve such a right. This means that for a nation to develop, there is need to ensure that every aspect is developed. The finding is also in tandem with Oyeleye *et al.* (2018), that community development involves efforts on the part of the people in a community. This effort is shown in the active participation of the people in the program designed for their well-being in their community. It also involves the resources of some outside authority, governmental or non-governmental organization, which the community must manage to solve their community problems. Weil *et al.* (2021) observed that community engagement is the involvement and participation in an organization for the welfare of the community. It is a volunteering, which involves giving personal time to projects in humanitarian NGOs or religious groups, are forms of community involvement. The engagement is generally motivated by values and ideals of social justice.

Findings from research question two and hypothesis two show that community participation in project development is about assessing needs of the community, it involves monitoring of project by the community member and community projects is made easier through community development agency. This is in line with the findings of Olukotun (2017) that community participation in project development is about assessing needs and participating in project planning and budgeting, implementation and monitoring. This improves public resource management and reduces corruption. The study is also in tandem with the findings of Mongbala (2003) that community members are easily mobilized to participate in community development programmes through the agency for community-based association. Meanwhile, the study of Granicus (2023) submitted that community participation builds and sustains cohesive communities. It is primarily part of a dialogue where organizations and communities can make decisions to create social capital. It can lead to improved outcomes for communities when government organizations and public decision-making entities seek out the aspirations, concerns and values of communities, who, in turn, share their aspirations, concerns and values with governing entities.

Findings from research question three also shows that poor participation by the people is an issue in the implementation of community development projects, lack of qualified professionals in the community affects participation in community development projects and corruption affects effective participation of community member in community development project. This is in line with the findings of Gboku & Lekoko (2007) that one of the factors affecting the utilization of community engagement for community development project implementation is poor participation by the people resulting from the fact that the majority of the community members are not involved in the planning and implementation of community development projects. The resultant effect is that community resources utilization process is faced with lack of co-operation by the members of the community. It is in tandem with the study that the utilization of community participation for community development projects is also faced with the problem of personnel skilled and unskilled labour, non-availability of expertise as well as mismanagement of community resources by some people. Meanwhile, the study of Asuka and Pulley (2008) showed that the dearth of skilled, qualified and competent manpower in the various communities, especially in executive capacity affects projects execution and most times ends in abandoned projects. These experts and other skilled manpower are in short supply in most communities, and thereby limiting the possibility of project execution and ultimately end up in abandoned project.

5.1. Implication of Findings

The utilization of community engagement and participation in community development projects will go a long way in ensuring that both Federal and State Projects in Lagos State reach the grassroots. This has been trial-tested through the Community and Social Development Project (CSDP), which has improved access to basic services for more than 23 million Nigerians across 29 states, contributing to poverty reduction. Similarly, the World Bank has employed a similar approach, known as Community-Led Development (CLD), in many countries affected by fragility, conflict, and violence to improve infrastructural, livelihoods, and community participation.

6. Conclusion

It can be concluded from the study that there is a need for community engagement and participation in the community development project so that people could claim more ownership of the project and it would enhance project completion. The study also showed that community engagement and participation are voluntary action for every member of the community. It demands joint participations from every member of the community as it helps in building projects in due time. Community engagement and participation in the development project would also make the people to be involved in the project planning, budgeting, monitoring and taking possession of the development project.

6.1. Recommendations

The study recommends the following:

- Community development associations should encourage their members especially the experts to participate in the ongoing project in their community even if they are not involved in the planning.
- Government or donor agencies should always include the community stakeholders in the planning of community project to enhance project success and management.
- The community development association should be transparent in the way in which projects are being handled.
- The idea of making participation in community project seamless should be imbibed to entice people into participating and engaging in the work.
- The community should be made to see community development project as a self-help project and this involves giving them ample opportunity to participate in the community project.

6.2. Limitations and Further Suggestions

The study was carried out at ten (10) different CDAs out of the 52 CDAs in Lagos State because of the high population of Lagos State. Rural and sub-urban Lagos sites were also used in the study. The authors suggest that further research be conducted in other CDAs within Lagos State to compare the results between the two settings.

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