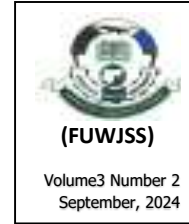


STAKEHOLDERS' ENGAGEMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS IN NASARAWA STATE, NIGERIA



Edward Dauda Ibrahim Anzaku
Department of Social Work,
Federal University of Lafia Nasarawa State, Nigeria
Email: *edwardanzaku@gmail.com*

Kuje Emmanuel Amevey
Email: *emmanuelamevey@gmail.com*

Abstract

This paper assesses the role of stakeholders in ensuring the sustainability of development projects in selected communities of Nasarawa State, Nigeria. A multi-stage sampling approach was used to select Buhar community in Akwanga Local Government Area, Nasarawa North, Tundun Adabu in Obi Local Government Area, Nasarawa South and Karmu in Karu Local Government Area, Nasarawa West Senatorial District. Key Informant Interview was employed for data collection. A total of 45 participants were engaged in the interview; with fifteen participants from each selected community. The participants were purposively selected using community leaders, women leaders, youth leaders, community development workers, religious' leaders, and physically challenged persons. Two major questions asked among others were; how stakeholders were involvement in the completed projects and how project are being managed. Data collected were content analyzed. English, Hausa, Eggon and Mada the native dialects of the participants were used to ensure adequate and proper understanding of the subject matter. The study result revealed that two of the selected projects were abandoned after completion, despite involvement of stakeholders. However, one of the projects is being owned and sustained by the community. The study also revealed two dimensions of participation: part-time and full-time participation. The study concludes that participation by relevant stakeholders in community or self-help projects remains a valuable principle in the sustenance of community projects. The paper recommends that community development workers should ensure proper and adequate community engagement in community projects from conception to evaluation.

Keywords: Stakeholders, self-help, sustainability and community project

Introduction

The bottom up approach in community development is seen as the most reliable for project performance and sustainability in community development. This is because it emphasises the participation of beneficiaries of intended project from the conception through to the evaluation. (Bal, Bryden, Fearon, & Ochieng, 2013). Stakeholders' involvement is crucial in any community development project as it guarantees sustainability and ownership of such project. This is because community members must feel the need, own the process and see the project as their project. Stakeholders' involvement is significant and relevant to a perfect delivery of project outcomes since a well-management community engagement process assists the members of such communities to work towards increasing the wellbeing of their community, while reducing negative environmental influences, and scaling up economic sustainability and maintenance of projects (Maina, 2013). Stakeholder participation or involvement should, as a matter of fact be mandatory for any sustainable community development project. Full and not partial involvement of community members and stakeholders will enable them take responsibility of identifying their problems and provide solutions for their problems. Community development officers can implement project without being in control over the decisions and resources of such project. This reduces the role of community development officers or any external agent to educating community members on appropriate means to provide solutions to their own problems (Boon, Bawole, & Ahenkan, 2012). The purpose of external agent educating and not being involve in decision making process and control of resources; is to enable such community to be self-reliant with or without government intervention which is in line with the United Nations definition of community development as "a process where community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems" (United Nation Development Programme, 2014).

It has been observed that, Nasarawa state has a long history of community projects carried out by government and non-governmental organization, with participation of major stakeholders driving the process (Amangwai, Yahaya, & Tom, 2019). Participation of stakeholders as a key principle among others has widely been accepted as a means of sustaining self-help or development efforts among people (Bal, Bryden, Fearon, & Ochieng, 2013). Recently, the principle of participation has

been noted with challenges especially that of unsuccessful completion and lack of sustenance of such efforts, despite adequate community involvement or beneficiaries. The general assumption that a community project with full participation of beneficiaries always succeeds and sustained; may not be the case in all community projects and places, as some challenges are being experience elsewhere in Nigeria. The need to validate the impact of involving stakeholders in the sustenance of some selected community projects in Nasarawa States becomes necessary to validate its relevance as a principle in development efforts. The object was to determine, how stakeholders' engagement affect ownership and sustainability of community projects in Nasarawa State. Community participation or popular participation has been identified long time and in human history and existence; as a vehicle that ensure ownership and sustainability of self-help projects (Mohammad, 2010). In the area of health and other development efforts, participation of Stakeholders or community members has become a priority in human efforts. For example, in global health, as a result of Millennium Development Goals (SDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Marston, Hinton, Kean, Baral, Ahuja, Costello, & Portela, 2016). Participation has been identified as key for implementing strategies in health promotion, prevention and in the control of chronic diseases (Narain, 2011). Rifkin (2014; 2009) and Morgan (2001), stated that, the wide accepted community participation as one of the principles of community development projects and programmes in theory and practice is not without challenges, which are both structural and in practice. In a study to ascertain the impact of community participation in the sustenance of community projects among the people of Bauchi State, Nigeria, Abdullahi and Sale (2014) affirmed some challenges of participation to include inadequate community empowerment to lead to sustenance of projects; despite its wide acceptability as a principle that ensures ownership and sustainability.

There is no doubt that the concept of participation in development projects is gaining prominence day by day in human society though, it has challenges of inability of development workers to facilitate adequate capacity for beneficiaries to attain sustainability of completed projects. According to Maduabuchi (2023) and Olukotun (2008), the lack of capacity by the host community, political interference, lack of accountability, trust and transparency affect participation and sustenance of rural development projects in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. The authors further contended that, despite these problems, community engagement

has facilitated a number of community projects such as culverts, electrification, construction of health centres, school blocks and bore holes to the advantage of the people.

According to Golicha (2010) in his study on the level of participation of stakeholders on the level of donor funded education project in Garissa district, of Kenya examined certain factors that lead to engagement of stakeholders in community project and their impact on such project. The study found out that the level of engagement of stakeholders was very low, and was responsible for the non-sustainability of such projects by members of those communities. Chifamba (2013) perceives participation as one of the most important principles of community development, despite disagreements between researchers on the concept of participation. In Nigeria, community members who are beneficiaries of community projects, have been relegated to consumers of such projects and their role in community development projects have been neglected and given less importance. This has been blamed on low participation of stakeholders or the beneficiaries. Stakeholders' engagement and participation in community projects has been limited to mere consultation, thereby neglecting their potentials and contributions. This is what the researcher in this paper referred to as partial participation of stakeholders. Such involvement, is a mere information and not participation, and has negative impact on any self-help or community efforts.

Plan and Kenya (2014) in their study in country home, Kenya, they found out that the sustainability of community development projects was poor due to the non-involvement or engagement of stakeholders in the design, planning and full implementation of such exercise. Furthermore, it has been observed that, sustainability and ownership of community development projects in Homa Bay Town Sub-country Kenya was very poor, despite millions of naira spent by government and non-governmental organizations across the nation. The poor sustenance was attributed to negligence and non-involvement or participation of stakeholders in carrying out these projects. Stakeholders' engagement and community participation help in identifying the weakness, strength, opportunity and threat to any community projects. This entails involving both the stakeholders in designing, planning, identification of felt needs, and implementation of community project. In a study conducted by Masanyiwa and Kinyashi (2008), on analysis of community participation in projects managed by Non-governmental organization: A case of world vision in central Tanzania; observed that popular participation in

community takes place in different ways and in different levels of project implantation. It was also noted that despite existing differences in both old and new community projects the ways and rate of community participation was limited to just consultation, information giving and contribution. The community members and stakeholders were not fully involved in designing, planning, evaluation, monitoring, decision making and implementation of projects.

One of the key factors noted in facilitatory and promoting stakeholder's engagement are the NGO's long-term process in working with the poor, education on skill of participatory method, community awareness, mobilization of resources, and their view and perception that intervention are targeted to meet participants felt needs. Poverty has been identified as the main factor limiting popular participation in community projects. Other factors include the approaches and policies of government and NGO's used in implementing community projects. Furthermore, Ofuoku (2011) in his study on community participation on sustainability of rural water projects in Delta State, Nigeria discovered that community projects funded were more sustainable and maintained than those only carried out by government. Stakeholders and community members were all involved in the design, evaluation, decision making, and execution of such community projects, which yielded positive outcomes. The study also found out that, there was high significant effect between popular participation and sustainability of community projects. It is on this background that this paper seeks to interrogate the role of stakeholders in ensuring the sustainability of development projects in communities of Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

Stakeholders' Engagement in Community Development Projects in Africa

According to Block, (2009) and Preece, (2017) community refers to a group of people in a particular geographical location who shares common interest together and have a feelings and belonging that bind them together. This definition sees community beyond just a geographical area, the emphasis lies on shared interest and feelings of belongings. Development can be defined as the improvement and advancement in the life of individuals, groups, and communities. Development has to do with the betterment and advancement in the life of people and not just increase or growth in size (Preece, 2017). Community development can be defined as self-help effort by community members to initiate and carry out a project with or without external support. Self-help effort means

community mobilizing her resources to meet up their basic or felt need (Schenck, Nel & Louw, 2010). The above definition of community development is people oriented project, which involves the community initiating a project by themselves without the help of government or other external support. For community projects to be sustained, it must involve collaboration of stakeholders in the community and outside the community. Stakeholders in this paper refers to individuals who have who have common interest or stands to benefit from a community development project. This involves community members who lives within that community and are been affected by such problems (Swanepoel & De Beer, 2011).

Stakeholders' engagement in sustainability of community projects is seen as engagement, involvement and participation of all members of a community in the design, planning, and implementation of community project without any control of decisions and resource by external agent. The community development worker should only be involved in creating awareness and educating members of such community on how to identify their problems and provide solutions to their problems without depending on government (Gonzalez, 1998). This is done to allow community members mobilized resources by themselves and take full ownership of such projects so as to guaranty the sustainability of such project. Here the researchers define Stakeholders' engagement as the ability of the facilitator or community development worker to allow the beneficiaries of projects to drive their own development projects. This process will make the stakeholders of beneficiaries own and sustain the efforts.

This is the ability to maintain or support a process continuously overtime (Mollenkamp & Thomas, 2021). The usage in this is continuation of a project by members or beneficiaries through collective maintenance of the project. This has to do with ensuring that the impact of the project for the current generation is extended to future generation (UN Brundtland Commission, 1987). Sustainability is an aspect of community development, which implies that, the benefits derived from executed projects are maintained and continue as long as the project exists. This has to do with strong commitment of local people, leadership, and other local resources needed resuscitate executed projects in the community. Sustainability is achieved through collaboration in decision making processes, so that all members benefit equally. This as well include people with different backgrounds, abilities, economic means ages and cultures.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopts the stakeholder's theory as its theoretical standpoint. Freeman Edward is regarded as the founder and father of the stakeholder's theory (Donaldson, & Preston, 1995). Although Freeman was influenced by system theory, corporate planning, and organizational theory. The basic assumption of the stakeholder theory is that for a proper organization and management of community projects and businesses it is important to look upon the interest of all stakeholders, not just shareholders (Lin, 2018). Stakeholders include community members, community leaders, employees and employers, NGO's and governmental groups (Philips, 2003). The theory stated that community projects should not look at the interest of government and political leaders over those stakeholders such as community members and leaders which the project affects them or which benefits them more (Lin, 2018). The applicability of this theory to this study is that; stakeholder's engagement in community projects should be a necessity to guarantee the sustainability of community projects. The theory can also be applied by taking cognizance of the needs and interest of all stakeholders involved in any community projects. Furthermore, when stakeholders are involved in the planning, designing, evaluation, monitoring, implementations and decisions making it makes them to take ownership of such projects and will also protect and guarantee sustainability of such community projects for a long period of time.

Research Methodology

The study adopts qualitative method and used participatory evaluation as its research design. Participatory evaluation is a method or approach to community projects evaluation that demands active engagement and participation of community members and stakeholders in a programme. This approach gives accuracy in planning, monitoring, evaluations, decision making and implementation of community projects that guaranteed sustainable outcomes. The central idea is that all groups having interest and being affected or of benefit to such projects are given opportunities to provide feedback and such feedback be implemented. Depending on the approach, participatory evaluation methodologies varies, but it implies the engagement of stakeholders in all action's steps taken in the implementation and evaluation. One community project each was selected from the three senatorial Zones of the State using fish bowl technique and purposive random sampling. The projects selected were those of bridge project in Buhar community in Akwanga LGA

representing Nasarawa North Senatorial Zones; Community Dam project in Tudun Adabu community in Obi LGA, Southern Senatorial Zones of Nasarawa State and Women Empowerment Centre in Toto, Western Senatorial Zones of Nasarawa State. Key Informant Interview was employed to elicit responses from respondents. A total of 45 respondents in all were engaged in interview; with a total of fifteen from each selected community of the selected project. The respondents were purposively selected using two community leaders, three ward heads, two women leaders, four youth leaders, one Community Development Worker, two religious' leaders, one each from the two major religions, and one physically challenged from the respective LGAs. Two major questions asked among others were. "how stakeholders were involvement in the completed project and how the project is being managed". Contents analysis was used to analyse data collected.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Stakeholders were identified based on social roles and status occupies in each of the communities. These stakeholders cut across the various strata made up of women, men, women, traditional rulers, religious leaders, Social Workers and physically challenged. This was done to ensure the involvement of relevant stakeholders within the communities. Stakeholders identified were the youth representatives, women leaders, council of elders and the community chiefs and persons living with disabilities. Others were religious leaders and development workers. 40% of the stakeholders were of low level of education' most of which were women and some community heads. The rest of the respondents (60 %) mostly Youth, few religious leaders and Social Workers attended higher level of education. That explained the reason for usage of local dilates and at times English language. From the total respondents of 45 from three community projects in Obi, Akwanga and Toto Local Government Areas. Two (2) community leaders, three (3) ward heads, four (4) youth leaders, two (2) religions leader, one (1) each from Christian and Islamic religion respectively, two (2) women leaders, one (1) Community Development Worker, and one (1) physically challenge from each of the selected community development projects for the study. Making a total of fifteen (15) respondents from each community.

Data was collected through key informant interview in Eggon, Mada, Hausa and English, and were translated to English language by the researchers. The transcribed was carefully cross checked in line with the

sound records and written notes during the field work to ensure accuracy. Content analysis was then used to analyse data generated from the field through the use of Key Informant Interview.

Stakeholders Engaged in Community Development Projects in Nasawara State

Almost all the respondents from Buhar community bridge project, n-13 (86.7 %) confirmed that they were involved in their project. When asked the level of involvement, respondents stated that they first started by holding a community meeting where stakeholders sat and analysed what the community needs were. It was in that meeting that the bridge project was identified as their number one need and was accepted by all. When they were asked of subsequent steps, they said, they were part of the plan from the beginning to the end. In term of contribution, the respondents said they various groups within the community shared duties and financial contributions. Women were there to supply water, while elders supervised by encouraging the youth at work and also champion contribution of materials for construction. The Social Worker or Development Worker, facilitated the process to ensure internalization of the process. However, one respondent declined adequate participation in the project. The respondent stated thus: "I was not fully involved because I was absent during the first community meeting that decided the project". When asked if he was briefed by his contemporaries, he said "yes I was properly briefed". Further probe revealed that they were committed to the project because it was something, they had no option than to ensure its success. The bridge project according to the respondents had been the community's major concern for decades and it was their uppermost need among other needs. In Buhar community, 80% of the respondents, both the youth, women and elders were in full picture of the project.

The participation of stakeholders in community project in Nasarawa State, was assessed in relation to project sustainability. Participation has been proven beyond doubt as it plays a significant role in project sustainability. This was confirmed in the three selected projects in the three senatorial zones of Nasarawa State, Nigeria. For example, participation of stakeholders in Buhar community bridge project has led to ownership and sustenance of the project. Today, the bridge is working perfectly since 2005-date. Community members use the bridge to advance the course of their livelihood in the area of healthcare delivery and for marketing of their produce. This was attested by several

respondents from the community. A respondent affirmed that; “the project is successful because, it was an initiative of the community”.

In Tudun Adabu, respondents pointed out that, the development work summoned stakeholders meeting where community needs were discussed. Majority of the stakeholders were men. Though water was identified as a need, concrete resolution regards other steps were not discussed. The community participation was merely information sharing as the facilitator relied much more on donor funds for the execution of the dam project. The women respondents in Tudun Adabu community said they were only informed that a dam project was being contemplated. One of the female respondents said “they only watched the project being executed. The traditional head and his council were as well informed with virtually no participation except for the place to site the project. When asked how the project was financed; a few $n=3$ (20%) of the respondents said the project was funded by the Embassy. The respondents said they were not carried along as they did little or no contribution.

Unlike the Buhar project, Tudun Adabu and Karmu community projects did not involve stakeholders as expected and the two projects are ghosts of those projects. In Tudun Adabu, respondents pointed out that, the development worker only summoned stakeholders meeting where community needs were discussed. Majority of the stakeholders were men. Though water was identified as a need, concrete resolution regards other steps were not discussed. Community participation was mere information sharing as the facilitator relied much more on donor funds for the execution of the dam project. The women respondents in Tudun Adabu community said they were only informed that a dam project was being contemplated. One of the female respondents said “they only watched the project being executed. The traditional head and his council were as well informed with virtually no participation except for the place to site the project. When asked how the project was financed; a few $n=3$ (20%) of the respondents said the project was funded by the Embassy.

The Karmu community had a woman weaving centre. This was to build women capacity for income generation for enhanced livelihood. When interviewed, more than half of the respondents $n=38$ (84.4%) expressed some reservation in the aspects of financial involvement. One of the respondents was of the view that, government should do it for them and not them financing it. When asked her reason of that opinion, she said “women are known to be assisted and not otherwise”. When respondents were asked how the project was financed, they said they were not aware, hence they were not involved. Most respondents were

passive in the whole process and were contended with being informed about the project with minimal participation.

In the case of Karmu women weaving centre, one of the respondents was of the view that, government should do it for them and not them financing it. When asked her reason of that opinion, she said “women are known to be assisted and not otherwise”. When respondents were asked how the project was financed, they said they were not aware, hence they were not involved. Most respondents were passive in the whole process and were contended with being informed about the project with minimal participation. The analysis above conformed to the stakeholder’s theory (Donaldson, & Preston, 1995), which contended that for a proper organization and management of community projects developmental efforts should consider the interest of all stakeholders as a means to sustenance of such community project. People’s participation is essential to the life of a project. The importance of the beneficiaries of any project guarantees its continuation. This result further confirmed, Plan, and Kenya (2014) in their study in country home, Kenya, that sustainability of community development projects was poor due to the non-involvement or engagement of stakeholders in the design, planning and full implementation of such exercise.

Furthermore, majority of the respondents agreed that stakeholders and popular participation should be encourage in all community projects. They should be involved in all aspect of the projects and not just given consultations roles, because this will make the community self-reliant as against dependent on government. All social workers or development workers interviewed accepted that the greatest challenge in people’s participation in community or self-help efforts is time consumption. The process is time consuming, hence, development worker needs patience to facilitate the process. The education of stakeholders should focus on ownership of community efforts and mobilisation of community resources to sustain completed project. Social Work main objective is empowering individual groups and communities to realise self-sustainability. This paper has further revealed the need for Social and Development workers to ensure community driven development that emphasises bottom-up approach to self-help efforts. Social workers as capacity builders should engage in educational development of communities toward empowerment, a sure means to ownership and sustainability of projects and livelihood. Educating individuals, groups and communities out of the crutches of dependency by ensuring and

building the capacity of community members to mobilize resources for their development.

Roles and Responsibilities of Stakeholders in Community Development Project in Nasarawa State

Respondents in Buhar community were of the opinion that stakeholders should be responsible for intuiting, planning, execution and evaluation and maintenance of community projects. Those with this view were the few educated who understand the concept of self-help. For instance, they were also aware that after the completion of the project, they are to own and sustain the project. However, some of the respondents were of the view that, government should take the driver's seat in community projects. Most of the respondents in Tudun Adabu and Karmu communities presented this view. Though some of the respondents are educated, they were alluded by ignorance of the concept of self-help. For example, one of the respondents said that: "Local Government administration should be responsible for all community projects as part of rural development agenda". Further probe on this perception on whether such conception works in communities; the respondent said: "no! he exclaimed, but continued by saying, "they are not willing to do so, resources to do so are within their reach".

Respondents from Buhar community, said they were the ones that have been maintaining the project since its completion in 2005 till date. On how they came about maintenance without problem, a respondent said "it was easy because community members were carried along on each of the stage of the project". Aside that, the project was the felt-need of the people. Community members see the project as their own. These two reasons enable us have common understanding over the project. The respondents in Tudun Adabu community said the project has since been abandoned. Nothing is working any more. After the completion of the dam project, in 2012, the community used same for one year successfully. From 2013 till date the dam has been deserted because the water has been drained and no member is cared about it anymore. Reason for that was that the community claimed they do not own the project. This was particularly emphasized by one of the community leaders. In his words he said: "the community has all along considered the project as a government project, and was looking forward to government for renovation of the dam. The same challenge happened on Karmu women weaving centre. Respondents said the project was abandoned one year after completion. A respondent said, "we were not able to continue with

the weaving because we could not maintain its activities”. Another respondent said “currently the weaving centre has been taken over by the judiciary, as upper area court”.

More than half of the respondents agreed community projects should be managed using community-based management. Whereby stakeholders and members of each community contribute through community resource mobilization in other to managed and sustain the project. Though some few n=4 (9%). respondents were of the opinion that management of community project should be vested on the government as part of their responsibility, the general opinion lies with community members who should own and sustain community projects.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Participation as one of the principles of community development projects and programmes was evaluated to validate its impact on sustainability of development projects in Nasarawa State. It was established that, the sustenance of self-help projects in communities across the State is a function of participation of relevant stakeholders within the project area. Despite difficulties in ensuring participation, it remains a viable principle in community and self-help efforts. For stakeholders to be fully involved in community projects, development officers or Social Workers should ensure community participation in community projects that involve them. This could be achieved through proper and continuing educating to build the capacity of stakeholders in resource mobilisation for sustainability of community projects. Also, development agencies should as a matter of necessity ensure bottom-up approach that emphasises social standards in people’s development.

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