

Community Participation and Project Sustainability in Rural Nigeria: A Study of Bauchi State Local Empowerment and Environmental Management Project

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Abstract

The concept of participation in development projects is gaining prominence by the day. The rationale is often that community involvement can help to reduce the degradation of biodiversity, address resource use conflicts, improve the community's quality of life and provide opportunities for economic activities. Other goals include improved governance through building stronger community institutions and increased community capacity, empowerment and voice, which can in turn provide a vehicle for strengthening local governance in other spheres of social and economic development. Thus, participation has now become an established orthodoxy in development thinking and practice. However, the challenge remains on how best it should be pursued in development interventions to improve the livelihoods of the poor. The present study was aimed at finding out how participation is perceived among local communities and how they participate in development interventions in their communities. Data for the study was collected from project documents, project staff, community committees and community members using open ended questionnaires and focus group discussions. A total of 90 respondents participated in the study. Research findings

indicate that the nature and extent of participation for the majority of local communities is generally limited to information giving, consultation and contribution. Local communities are generally not actively involved in decision making, planning, monitoring and evaluation processes. Factors identified as key in promoting stakeholders' participation are the long term commitment in working with the local communities, staff with knowledge and skills on participatory approaches, continuous community sensitization and mobilization, and perceptions that interventions being implemented are addressing participants' needs. Poverty was seen to be the main factor limiting local communities' participation. Other factors are non flexible organizational policies, poor community leadership and dependency syndrome. Based on these findings, it is concluded that participation of local communities in development interventions is generally limited to 'contribution' and therefore not 'empowering' to the local communities to take control of the process. The researchers recommend some changes in terms of management structures and human capacity to help widen the scope of participation for local communities.

Key words: Empowerment, governance, perception, poverty & livelihood

Introduction

The incorporation of the local communities in development projects has become a common phenomenon globally since the introduction of the concept in the seventies (Emmet, 2000). The concept originated after it was realized that the top-down approach to development that was in place had serious consequences in project sustainability terms. Therefore, this new approach, termed the bottom-up has been viewed as a panacea for the sustainability of projects at community level (World Bank, 1996). However, even though the discourse on participation has been widely accepted as a workable alternative for the realization of sustainable development, the rapid proliferation of the term and its multitude applications has sparked a great deal of debate and controversy (Glickman and Servon, 2003). Concerns have thus been raised about the effectiveness of community participation in project sustainability because of the incompatibility of

theory and practice. As such, the concept has remained a key theme in development dialogue for the past few decades (UNDP, 2000).

Description and evolution of the Project

The Local Empowerment and Environmental Management Project (LEEMP) was designed to establish an institutional mechanism for transferring investment resources to communities in order to enable them finance their own developmental priorities (World Bank, 1996). It also emphasizes the sustainable management of the environment as a prerequisite to sustainable livelihood and development. The project is anchored on community driven approaches to development, which entails that communities prioritize their own development needs through a participatory process with assistance from operation officers (OOs). The resulting priorities would revolve around pure public goods (Schools, health centres, feeder roads and portable water), impure public goods (soil erosion control, soil conservation etc) and alternative income generating schemes. The project used matching grants to encourage already existing mechanisms within communities to enhance their development (World Bank, 1996). The project has two inter-related development objectives viz; that beneficiaries plan, co-finance, implement and continue to operate and maintain environmentally sustainable and socially inclusive multi-sectoral micro-projects; and strengthen the institutional framework for supporting environmentally sustainable and socially inclusive development at Federal, State and Local government levels (SSL, 2008).

The project design which was based upon several years of research and experimentation has challenges in issues of institutional capacity, accountability and transparency as bottom-line of concern in Nigeria (SSL, 2008). Public institutions are weak and unable to address the challenges of poverty reduction while addressing the rates of environmental degradation, natural resources depletion and unsustainable use of biological resources. The project was therefore aimed at contributing to the capacity building of all participating local governments. The intervention followed the result of the activities of FORMECO and the feasibility studies by professional consultants (SSL, 2008). In this process, the implementation of the identified components was supported and as a result funds were committed to an extent. However, following project review in 2006, funds were not allocated to income generation and we expected the already disbursed funds to be revolved amongst and between beneficiaries, and

that the communities should continue to recover the disbursed amounts that could be revolved (SSL, 2008).

The implementation of the project has been through local institutions at community and local levels. Subject matter specialist' and operation officers (OOs) were capacitated and trained as trainers in order to ensure that the project was implemented in a genuine participatory manner (SSL, 2008). These operation officers were the engine block of the project. They facilitated the formulation of community development projects and provided training, guidance and supervision for all project activities at the community level. The project has also been implemented by the State Project Support Unit (SPSU) on behalf of the Bauchi State Government and with the full involvement of the local governments and the community project management committees in the planning, design, implementation and monitoring of project activities. The management and implementation has been in accordance with World Bank regulations and procedures. This has also been the case with respect to financial management. The overall management responsibility has rested on SPSU reporting to Federal Project Support Unit (FPSU) and Government of Bauchi State through the approved official channels. The daily management has been the responsibility of a relatively small and therefore relatively efficient project support unit headed by a state coordinator supported by subject matter specialists.

Methodology

The study area

Bauchi state was until 1976 a province in the North-Eastern State of Nigeria. According to the 2006 census, the state has a population of 4,653,066. Bauchi state has gone through tremendous transformation over the years. The state occupies a total land area of 49,119 km² representing about 5.3% of Nigeria's total land mass and is located between latitudes 9° 3' and 12° 3' north of the equator. Longitudinally, it lies between 8° 50' and 11° east of the Greenwich meridian. The state is bordered by seven states, Kano and Jigawa to the north, Taraba and Plateau to the south, Gombe and Yobe to the east and Kaduna to the west (SSL, 2008).

Data Collection

The research was made possible by the use of various research tools. These included secondary and primary data collection methods. Secondary data in this case refers to data already prepared in the form of both published and unpublished documents (Sambo, 2006). On the other hand, primary data collection methods refer to field data survey. These methods were both qualitative and quantitative in nature (Otite and Ogionwa, 2006). With regards to qualitative techniques, the researchers took advantage of the usefulness of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) techniques such as focus group discussions, and semi-structured interviews with key informants. Qualitative techniques are essential in the sense that they emphasize stakeholder participation and mutual learning (White, 1996). They also promote continuous learning, self-assessment and sharing of experience (Masanyiwa and Kinyashi, 2008). Whilst the quantitative approach such as household interviews was useful in obtaining personal information from the respondents, physical inspection and on the spot checks were helpful in collecting data on the effectiveness of community participation in ensuring sustainable projects in communities (Patton, 1990).

Participatory Rural Appraisal Tools

Participatory Rural Appraisal is a process in which communities analyze their own situation and make decisions themselves about how best to tackle their problems (White, 1996). It is a qualitative research method used to gain in depth understanding of a community or situation (Masanyiwa and Kinyashi, 2008). The technique is based on the philosophy that outsiders need to learn from the insiders, and the insiders can analyze their own problems (Chambers, 1983). At least one focus group discussion was undertaken in each community. The participants comprised of varying age, and sex and religions where there is diversity. This strategy ensured cross-fertilization of information and ideas. Selection of participants in the discussions was also based on gender composition to ensure that participatory development related issues associated with both men and women are captured. This even helped in evaluating the level of awareness of participatory development among participants of different sexes (White, 1996). To ensure more objectivity, participants in the groups were selected by counting, where even numbers comprised one group and odd numbers the other (Otite and Ogionwa, 2006). A questionnaire checklist to guide the discussions was used. For each community, some 10 community members

were chosen and interviewed. Various questions were asked on farm productivity and land use changes including the adjustment strategies and the range of options available to adjust to. Local community responses were important in gathering data on field types and land use changes in time and space (Wilcox, 1994). Key informants accompanied researchers during visits to selected routes for a transect walk. Transects deemed most representative for each community and those from which changes on land use could be depicted in detail by most members of the age groups were visited. Information was recorded from farmers of same age groups, from the older age groups to the youngest. Interviews with key informants were also conducted in this research. This method was used to get information from institutions and organizations involved in projects implementation. Traditional leaders and local authority representatives, particularly the project desk officers were engaged in FGDs as part of local leadership (SSL, 2008). All these helped get a clear perception of community participation and that gave us clear information on participatory development from all stakeholders. In situations where some issues remained unclear, we probed in order to get more information. Special attention was given to project implementation document (PID) and project appraisal document (PAD) rules and by-laws governing project implementation (World Bank, 1996). This also included policy issues related to community participation in project implementation in the area.

Quantitative Methods

Household questionnaires were administered with the help of research assistants. Ninety households were interviewed across the state, ten from each local government. The study employed purposive and random sampling techniques at each level (Sambo, 2005; Otite and Ogionwa, 2006) as illustrated in the table below. Random sampling procedure was adopted for the target interviewees and was done at three levels. These are local, community and household levels.

Sampling Technique

A total of 90 households were randomly selected and sampled from the three chosen LGAs, each from a senatorial district in the state. A list of participating communities was obtained from the state project support unit. From the project documents, a community has a population of about 3000 people and assuming that each community has an average of 10 people per

household, 30 households were randomly selected to give 10% coverage for the study per community. The three communities selected for the present study were as follows: Jarmawo, Sabon Gida and Garin Jauro in Giade, Tafawa Balewa and Warji LGAs of Northern, Southern and Central senatorial districts respectively. These communities were selected using a random number table where each community was assigned a number and these were written on small cards, which were shuffled and handpicked. This implies that every community had an equal probability of being selected.

Sampling at Household

A total of ninety households were interviewed from a total of two hundred and seventy households, forming a 30% sample size. The questionnaire breakdown per community was uniform. Selection of sampled households was precisely random since all the houses was assigned numbers written on small cards, which were also shuffled and handpicked (Sambo, 2005). This ensured that each household stood a chance of being interviewed. The research was targeted in the direction of heads of households simply because they are believed to have a settled and permanent life in their communities and are thus significant participants in development projects were they reside. However, because of the unavailability of heads at the time of the survey in some houses, the eldest person present was interviewed.

Results and Discussion

The findings of this study as presented are a product of the various methodological tools and techniques employed during the process of the field study. These findings are a representative of different views given by the various stakeholders in rural development and as such helps in ascertaining the workability or otherwise of community participation and project management and sustainability in local Nigeria. These range from socio-economic issues, organizational as well as community conceptualization of the notion of community participation in sustainable development.

Socio-economic Background and Community Participation

We administered 90 household questionnaires and accordingly all interviews were undertaken with the head of the households, except where the head was not available and the most senior member available in the household was interviewed. The result was sorted and presented according to age group distributions (See Table 1).

Table 1: Age Group Distribution of Respondents

Age group in years	No of House holds	Percent
15-25	2	2.2
26-35	11	12.2
36-45	29	32.2
46-55	22	24.4
56 and above	26	28.89
Total	90	100

Of the interviewees at household level about 80 percent were more than 35 years of age. This implies that the majority of the residents are reasonably old enough to have lived long in the community and be able to provide appropriate information for the study.

Marital Status

In terms of marital status 79 percent of the householders interviewed were married while 14 percent were single, 6percent were widowed and only 2 percent were divorced. The table below shows a breakdown of the respondents according to marital status.

Table 2: Marital status of respondents

Status	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Married	82	91.1
Single	5	5.6
Separated/Widowed	3	3.3
Total	90	100

Educational Background

Generally, the respondents were not educated. Primary school was the highest institution attended. Some have some informal education and majority has neither.

Table 3: Educational background of respondents

Status	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Formal education	11	12.2
Informal	23	25.6
Others	56	62.2
Total	90	100

Ethnic Representation

The Hausa ethnic group constituted more than half of the respondents (56 percent) followed by the Fulani (29 percent) while 15 percent was Kanuri. This variation is as shown below.

Table 4: Distribution of population by ethnic affiliation

Ethnic group	Number	Percentage
Hausa	36	40.0
Fulani	31	34.4
Kanuri	11	12.2
Others	12	13.3
Total	90	100

Community participation has been argued to mean differently to different people in different settings and as such these divisions were not at all instrumental in setting the phase for active participation. A people’s ethnic background is supposed to be pivotal as it defines their values and systems which in turn explain how they interact.

Community Participation in Project Implementation

Beneficiary participation in project life cycle is of importance for the realization of sustainable projects. Indeed any development initiative that excludes local communities in terms of participation is an antithesis to sustainability in a project. The responses to this matter are supportive of the above idea. Of the respondents about 40 % claimed that they have the

capacity to participate actively in projects implementation, while more than 50% said they lack the capacity to participate due to various reasons.

Table 5: Community's capacity to participate by age

Age Category	Not Capable		Capable	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
15-25	-	-	2	2.2
26-35	9	10	2	2.2
36-45	20	22.2	9	10.0
46-55	15	16.7	7	7.8
56 and above	6	6.7	20	22.2
Total	50	55.6	40	44.4

Even though from the responses, community participation was high it should be borne in mind that this form of participation might not necessarily be active. It was "guided participatory" where project staff prescribes to the participants how they should engage each other in the process. Mostly it is done through platforms such as capacity building workshops where these staff dominate the proceedings, lecturing the community on forms of engagement.

Community Participation

The respondents claimed that they have access to participation in projects. However, it was observed that females were not sufficiently allowed to partake in the process; this perhaps is due to some cultural/religious values. This was concluded from the composition of community project management communities (CPMCs) and attendance at community meetings through project implementation process and monitoring. Not only do few or no female members partake, but many community members were not carried along in the process. In fact there was no proper documentation of records and disclosure of information. This is likely to pose a serious challenge in terms of sustainability since the issue of ownership was compromised.

Table 6: Response on community’s level of participation in the project cycle

Age Category	High		Moderate		Low		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent		%
15-25	1	5.3	1	2.9	-	-	2	2.2
26-35	4	21.1	4	11.4	3	8.3	11	12.2
36-45	6	31.6	14	40	9	25	29	32.2
46-55	5	26.3	11	31.4	6	16.7	2	24.4
56 & above	3	15.8	5	14.3	18	50	2	28.9
Total	19	100.1	35	100	36	100	90	99.9

Effectiveness of Community Participation in Developmental Projects

The majority of the respondents view their participation in projects as a prelude to sustainable development. The research established that maximum participation of community members in the project cycle, from design to implementation as well as monitoring and evaluation stages is of great importance for effective sustainability. Of the household questionnaire respondents about 87% have testified that the concept of community participation is very instrumental in developmental projects if appropriately implemented, whilst 23% of the respondents do not agree. During group discussions, it was established that respondents view their participation as the most effective solution to development woes that have been affecting societies. Therefore, taking from the views of the respondents, it is important to note that communities tend to contribute much to the development of their societies particularly through the concept of the bottom up then the traditional top-down approach.

However, in as much as the concept has proved to be an effective and sound alternative to sustainable development in the eyes of the majority of the respondents, it has often been compromised by development agents who often bring with them alternative ways of engaging in project implementation (UNDP, 2000). They either wittingly or otherwise tend to slow and dampen the concept of the CDD by putting themselves on the driver’s seat. This was evident from issues of project appraisals and procurement to even issues of choice and location of projects. This tends to de-motivate them to such an extent that they do not give their full effort in the process. Thus, despite the effectiveness of the concept, it has been established that projects have heavily been affected by

sustainable participation of the poor majority community members who often withdraw their services as a result of the approach of support agencies themselves (White, 1996). Besides this, if properly implemented the idea of active community participation would be a noble one and be very effective in sustainable terms.

Challenges and Barriers to Community Participation in Projects

This research has established that there are a wide range of factors that hinder and indeed constrain the promotion of participatory development and these often lead to the emergence of non-participatory approaches. These obstacles range from institutional to socio-cultural, technical, and logistical, and are spread over a seemingly endless spectrum. There are for instance the issues of elite capture, restrictions of fundable projects, the entry point activities, corruption of project staff as well community project management committees and local authorities and political interferences. All these tend to jeopardize the of poor innocent local community members in participation.

Table 7: Response on challenges and barriers in community participation

Barriers	Responses	(%)
Outside interference	19	12.3
Political interference	25	16.1
Conflicts among beneficiaries	9	5.8
Selective participation	28	18.1
Not emphasizing much on livelihood issues	40	25.8
Corruption by project staff/facilitators	34	21.9
Total	155	100

A host of factors have been identified as obstacles to effective participation in development programmes and projects. Wilcox (1994) discusses three major obstacles to people's participation; these are structural, administrative and social barriers. Structural obstacles form part of the complex and centralized organisational systems that control decision making, resource allocation and information, and are not oriented towards people's participation. This situation is usually typified by a 'top-down' development approach. Administrative obstacles relate to bureaucratic procedures, operated by a set of guidelines and adopt a blue print approach, providing little space for people to make their own decisions or control their development process. The social impediments include

mentality of dependence, culture of silence, domination by the local elite, gender inequality, and low levels of education and of exposure to non-local information.

Another obstacle is “standardization of approaches” (Wilcox, 1994), which contradicts the original aims of participation and to moving away from the limitations of blue print planning and implementation towards more flexible and context-specific methodologies. According to Emmet (2000), participation has been translated into managerial “toolboxes” of procedures and techniques (Honadle and Van Sant, 1985). This limited approach gives rise to a number of critical paradoxes: approaches to projects remain largely concerned with efficiency, and focus attention only on the highly visible, formal, local organisations, overlooking the numerous communal activities that occur through daily interactions and socially embedded arrangements (Wilcox, 1994). White (1996) and Lohdi and Makki (2010) identify other barriers such as power structures within local communities, rigid professional attitudes among programme and project staff, little awareness among people of rights they may have or opportunities they may exploit, and little emphasis on qualitative achievements of participation. These barriers are situation-specific, and need to be carefully analysed in particular contexts.

Conclusion and Recommendations

A number of important lessons can be learnt. Even though we need to implement best practices in management domain as a nation, unfortunately, we still follow obsolete procedures in planning and management practices. The stakeholders’ interests are not mapped and policies are made with very little consideration and perspective. It is however, pertinent to note that the present intervention provided some level of support to communities that addressed some of their felt needs. A critical lesson to be drawn is that successful community driven development requires widespread and participatory stakeholder involvement in the selection of micro-level investments, the choice of project locations and implementation arrangements. The project approach must also be flexible in order to refine the incentives for community participation and adapting the strategy for scaling-up. This is particularly so, as the capacity of the participants to be carried along is very low. The project should continue to adopt a multi-sectoral development approach. Benefits must accrue quickly. Community planning must be truly

participatory in an approach of bottom-up. The poor and vulnerable should be targeted by including appropriate safety nets. Community based organizations and local governments should be involved in order to sustain investments and facilitate scaling-up. Conservation activities should be complemented with interventions aimed at meeting socioeconomic needs. Systematic monitoring and evaluation programmes should be established and followed.

Other recommendations should be in the areas of support for policy measures especially in relation with line ministries and local governments; institutional capacity, quality and motivation of staff; participation of target groups; Integration of the project into society (socio-cultural factors), the impact of the project on various groups; issues of poverty alleviation, gender, income generation; the use of natural resources and the sustainability of such utilization (environmental factors).

As a conclusion, developing effective community management institutions and organizations requires long- term commitment of resources (men, money & materials). Many well-intentioned programmes involving local communities have given way or collapsed because the necessary support was not available beyond the initial project phase. A typical three-to-five year project timeframe has consistently proven too short to reach the stage where they can operate independently. So for sustainability, the project should be planned after an appraisal of the proposed intervened communities in order to take into consideration their peculiar needs and strengths. Only then can we guaranty contribution to improved community livelihoods and resource conservation.

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