

## **Drivers of stakeholder's participation: Qualitative evidence from Community and Social Development Program (CSDP) in North Eastern Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

Understanding the drivers of stakeholder participation is crucial for the success of any project. This study explored the factors that influence stakeholder engagement in Community and social development program in North-East, Nigeria. The study employed qualitative research procedures to collect data through in-dept interviews and focus group discussions with 24 purposely selected informants. Thematic analysis was used in the analysis and the findings presented accordingly. The findings reveal that when stakeholders perceive the availability of funds as adequate and timely, their willingness to participate increases significantly. Community acceptance is found to be closely tied to cultural and social norms, indicating that projects aligned with these norms are more likely to be embraced by the community. Awareness of project goals is linked to effective communication strategies, suggesting that clear and consistent messaging is imperative for fostering stakeholder engagement. In conclusion, the study underscores the importance of securing funding, gaining community acceptance, and enhancing awareness of project goals to drive stakeholder participation. These findings have implications for project managers and policymakers, who must prioritize these drivers to ensure the successful engagement of stakeholders in project activities.

**Keywords:** *Drivers, Stakeholder, Participation, North-East, Nigeria, CSDP*

## **Introduction**

Participatory development has taken a centre-stage in community and social development programs aiming to achieve goals and sustainability. Participation has now become an established orthodoxy in development thinking and practice (Masanyiwa 2008). According to Rahnema (2020), the process of designing, carrying out, and assessing development initiatives that have an impact on people and communities is known as participatory development. This implies that through the process of participatory development, people and communities actively take part in the formulation, execution, and assessment of development projects. Its foundation is the notion that individuals are the greatest assessors of their own needs and possess important information and abilities that they may use to advance issues that impact them. Moreover, a crucial component of participatory development is stakeholder engagement. People or organizations that have an interest in, or a "stake" in the project or problem at hand are considered stakeholders (Aaltonen, 2010; Cornwall, 2003). Stakeholders in development initiatives comprise members of the community, public servants, non-governmental organizations, businesses, and other entities. According to one of the fundamental tenets of participatory development, persons having a stake in the development project are expected to have an equal chance to participate in the development process, (Mansuri, 2012; Platteau & Abraham, 2004). Ensuring the participation of marginalized or disadvantaged groups, including women, children, individuals with disabilities, and indigenous communities.

There are several ways to engage in participatory development. Focus groups, seminars, community gatherings, and other types of consultation are among the several ways of participation in participatory development. These techniques may be applied for information gathering, need

assessment, problem identification, and solution development. The significance of local ownership is also emphasized by participatory development (Lucky, 2016; Dearden & Rizvi, 2008). This suggests that long-term sustainability of the solutions generated and community's influence over development initiatives that impact them are required. As stakeholders are more likely to support and maintain a project if they have been involved in its design and implementation, involving them in the development process can also result in better responsibility. Stakeholder involvement and participatory development, however, are not necessarily simple processes. While it might be difficult to guarantee that all stakeholders have an equal chance to engage and that their perspectives are heard, participatory development and stakeholder involvement can result in increased accountability and local ownership. Likewise, lack of stakeholder engagement in the development does not only leads to poor implementation of the development project, but normally raises a lot of sustainability issues Luyet, et al (2012).

There are several community-led and participatory development initiatives in Nigeria that aim to improve social services and infrastructure. One of such initiatives is the Community and social Development Project (CSDP). It is in recognition for the important need to provide basic social infrastructure in poor communities in Nigeria that the Federal government in partnership International Development Association (IDA), a subsidiary of the World Bank, supported the implementation of the Community and Social development Project. The project became effective in 2009 with the overall goal of improving access to services for Human Development (HD). However, the specific objectives of the project were to;

1. Support empowerment of communities and LGAs for

sustainable increase access to poor people.

2. To improve social and natural resource infrastructure.

The bottom-up development approach was adopted in the project to empower communities to develop, implement and monitor micro-social infrastructure projects and as at the time of the project closure in 2021, the project has been successful in 29 of Nigeria's 36 states with over 20 million people benefiting from the project. (World Bank, 2022). Additionally, available literature has reported the success of the project in different contexts of implementation. For instance, Gambo (2017) while exploring how participation, interest and involvement of community members/beneficiaries in the planning and execution of Community and Social Development Project (CSDP) in Taraba State, found that community members were actively involved and participated in the planning and execution of the CSDP micro projects in their communities. The study further reported that the projects executed have been impacting positively in the lives of community members. In an assessment of the project impact in Ondo state, Olusola (2021) reported the positive impact of the project in the community manifesting in increased students' enrolment at Jooro high school. Similarly, the electric poles extension has improved the electric voltage in the community as a result of effective and timely awareness of the project objectives. However, in spite of the successes recorded by the project, one important aspect that remains elusive in literature is what motivated stakeholders' participation in the project leading to the reported success of the project? This study aims at exploring the drivers of stakeholder's participation in Community and Social Development Project among the project participants in the participating states of Northeast, Nigeria. An understanding of these influencing factors is important in ensuring stakeholder participation in development

project which is generally considered as a necessary ingredient for successful achievement of development goals. Furthermore, while providing blueprint for effective stakeholder participation, the study will make yet another contribution to existing literature on stakeholder participation in development projects.

## **Literature Review**

### **The concept of participatory Development**

In the field of development studies, participatory development has been extensively researched, and a substantial body of literature has been written on it. Participatory development has been characterized by several academics as a process in which people and communities actively take part in the conception, execution, and assessment of development initiatives that impact them. Empowerment, inclusivity, and community ownership are the cornerstones of participatory development. An additional significant facet of the scholarly literature pertaining to participatory development is the analysis of its application in various settings (Gustafson, 2017) Research has shown that participatory development can occur in development processes in forms of workshop attendance, focus group meetings and other forms of consultations.

As pointed out earlier, the highlights of the challenges and limitations of participatory development have been reported in literature. It is evident that participatory development can be difficult to implement especially in contexts where there is lack of political will to embrace change, dearth of resources and the capacity to effectively respond to goals of the development project (Rosilawati et al, 2018; Cornwall, 2003). Moreover, it has also been established that community acceptance of the development project from stakeholders and their readiness to align with the goals of the development project promotes participatory development (Shefer et al, 2008)

The presence and extent of political will can be seen as a key determinant of the success or failure of policies, programs and projects, including those related to community development initiatives like the CSDP. According to Brinkerhoff (2010) political will refers to the commitment of actors to undertake actions to achieve a set of objectives of the development. Empirical evidences suggests that when the commitment to achieving development objectives are prioritized, it does not only motivate stakeholders in putting in their best towards the development objectives but also ensures it sustainability. In an examination of political will and quality education in Nigeria, Abdullahi (2014) found that inherent institutional constraints such as lack of commitment by the government, lack of funding and poor coordination are key to educational crises in the country. As a way of mitigation these crises, the paper recommended increased commitment of state, proper accountability, public private partnership ensuring better performance. In a related study analysing the perception of stakeholders in development projects, it was reported that the dimensions related to the political environment of the international development community plays a significant role in the perception of project success (Diallo, 2014).

Availability of resources is one critical aspect for the success of any development program. When funds coupled with competent stakeholders are made available and accessible for the implementation of development projects, it does not only attract stakeholder participation to the development process but also ensures effective and efficient achievement of the project goals. Meanwhile, adequate budgeting of schools, regular auditing of accounts, proper utilization of funds was found to have had a positive and significant relationship with stakeholder participation in a study of factors that motivated stakeholder participation in public

schools in Rivers state, Nigeria, (Analaba 2023). Conversely, poor or lack of projects funding and expertise usually results into low stakeholder participation.

The desire by community to embrace change is a necessary ingredient to drive interest in accepting initiatives aimed at improving the social and economic life within communities. This is especially true when the development initiative aligns with the needs of the community. Studies have shown that if communities are involved in the formulation and implementation of initiatives on issues directing affecting them, the expectation is overwhelming support from stakeholders in ensuring not only the gain for immediate benefits of the projects but will ultimately, ensure the sustainability of the project. For instance, the success of The Nigeria National Fadama Development Program in improved economic conditions, boosted agricultural incomes and helped in reducing rural poverty, was largely attributed to communities' embracement of more inclusive and participatory model of local economic decision making (Hima, 2016). Moreover, in a study on the impact of Community and Social Development program in Cross River, Nigeria, Ndem (2020) reported that due to communities' acceptance and active participation of stakeholders in the project, provision of basic health care facilities significantly relates with socio-economic wellbeing of the rural poor in Odukpani local government area of the state.

### **Research methodology**

**Research Context:** The North-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria, which comprises six States-Adamawa, Bauchi,

Borno, Gombe, Taraba, and Yobe. North East is among the least developed regions in the country (Dauda, 2021). According National Bureau of Statistics (2020) poverty indices in the region indicates 87.72% in Taraba, 75,41% in Adamawa, 72.34% in Yobe, 68.8% in

Borno, 62.31% in Gombe and 61.53% in Bauchi.

The geo-political zone has been experiencing a humanitarian crisis for over fourteen years due to ongoing conflict. As of April 2024, there are approximately 2.7 million people affected, including 1.8 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and 0.9 million returnees, with Borno state being the epicentre of the crisis (GPS, 2024). Wide inequalities and low literacy level coupled with other challenges of development occasioned by the dreaded Boko Haram insurgency have greatly affected socio-economic development of the region. Figure 1 shows the 6 states that make the North-East geo-political zone



Figure 1: Map of North-East Nigeria Source: (google maps 2016)

### Research Design and Procedure

Initially, stakeholder analysis was done after data from all stakeholders of Community and social development program was gathered. The process of identifying and assessing the significance of various groups of individuals who could be impacted by a project or choice is known as stakeholder analysis. FGDs and interviews were utilized in the collection of data for the study because interviews and focus group discussions offers ample opportunity to informants to share their thoughts and experiences of their drivers to participate in the program (Gill, 2018). In the

North-East, CSDP has carried out several programs. As a result, contacting the primary stakeholders for whom the program was created and run was simple. The interview guide for this study was constructed based on the general objective of the study to explore the drivers of stakeholder participation in CSDP. This guided the conduct of the in-depth interviews while ensuring consistency in the type of questions posed to each informant. Ten (12) individual interviews and three (3) focus group sessions with four (4) participants each were conducted to elicit data for the study. The researcher presided in the conduct of the interviews assisted by a research assistant recording responses using audio device. Each of the individual interviews lasted between 20 to 30 minutes while the focus group lasted between 35-40 minutes.

All informants were made to understand the purpose of the study, made to understand that their participation in the study was voluntary and they can cease to be part whenever they so wish, and their confidentiality assured by the researcher. In all, a total of 24 informants participated in the study.

### Findings and discussions

It is important to state that the informants that provided information in answering the research questions are stakeholders in the Community and social development program in the North-East part of Nigeria. These includes political leaders, Community Development associations, beneficiaries of the program at various participating communities and civil society organizations spread across the six states of the study areas. All informants have varying levels of formal education and falls within the ages of 30-55. In addition, all informants had past experiences of participating in one or more similar development programs

The results showed that community involvement is critical to the implementation of development projects because it increases

the likelihood of the project's success and sustainability by addressing the demands and concerns of the community.

Nonetheless, a number of drivers were found to have motivated stakeholders to actively engaged in the program. The themes identified to have driven the engagement of stakeholders towards participating in the program includes adequate and timely knowledge of the program, availability of resources and acceptance of the program's objectives by benefitting communities. The following section provide explanations of the identified themes.

### **Theme 1: Adequate and timely knowledge of the program**

As pointed out by (Hussain & Miraj 2018; Angelia et al. 2020), participatory development is a method of development that entails actively involving and engaging stakeholders in the conception, execution, and assessment of development initiatives. True to these assertions, informants averred that adequate and timely knowledge about the program has greatly contributed in preparing them to partake in decision-making process and development initiatives that have direct bearing to the needs and aspiration of their various communities. The informants did believe that strengthening communication and aligning the development objectives to the needs and aspirations of benefitting communities will not only foster active participation of various stakeholders in the development process, but also successful achievement of goals and ultimately, sustainability of the program. A lack of communication of knowledge and comprehension of participatory development objectives often results in the community's exclusion from the decision-making process and development initiatives that are unable to satisfy the demands of the community. One of the informants pointed out during interview that

*“If you invite me to your occasion on time, open your doors for my little contribution, it is natural to get the best from me. This is exactly how this program officials did with the locals. They are always interactive with communities”.*

While agreeing with the statement above, another informant asserted that;

*“there was adequate information about the project before its commencement. If all programs will be carried out in this way, identifying our needs and working with us to find solution to the problem is to me, the best thing to do. The owner of a roof knows best where it is leaking”*

Again, as captured during a focus group discussion, another informant stated that;

*“Lack of information about the program can hinder individuals and communities to engage in the decision-making process of government and community affairs”.*

This finding supports the literature by Dearden, & Rizvi (2008) who reported that access to information by stakeholders on the program objectives will not only equip them with knowledge of participatory processes but will facilitate their engagement in the development process.

### **Theme 2: Resource Availability**

There is no doubt that the success of any development project largely depends on availability of both human and financial resources and active engagement of stakeholders in the development process. While expressing their motivations for participation in the program, informants noted that availability of resources in terms of trained facilitators and adequate and timely funding of the program by both partners has endeared stakeholders to show more commitment to the success of the program.

Assertion by an informant during interview that;

*“The skills and competence of the program officials, coupled with good understanding of our communities, needs and language has motivated our interest to fully partake in all activities of the program”.*

In another interview, while responding to researchers' question on what drives stakeholders' interest to participate in the program, an informant stated that

*“it is part of our tradition that when a stranger wishes to offer you garment, assess the garment he is wearing before you accept the offer. If the garment he is wearing is better than the one he is offering you, that is a sign that he is capable of giving you a better garment. We saw readiness, skills and the competence of the development partners”*

Yet another informant observed that;

*“the facilities provided for the training and capacity building sessions to raise awareness on the participatory processes was overwhelming, the facilitators were prompt and well skilled, venue of the sessions were conducive and participants of the training sessions well fed and training materials adequately provided. Of importance also was the medium of instruction in local language facilitated good understanding thereby making comprehension easier and endearing stakeholders towards the achievement of the program objectives”.*

This finding affirms (Dearden & Rizvi, 2008; Platteau & Abraham, 2004) who reported that availability of human resources is a potential driving force for stakeholder participation in development process.

In respect of funds availability, although there was initial delay in payment of counterpart funding from participating states and local governments, the quick resolution of the matter according to informants had renewed their hope in the continuation as well as

commitment towards successful implementation and execution of the program to its logical conclusion. This according to informant had driven their interest to engage with the goals and aspirations of the program. Expressions by informants to support availability of funds to the project were captured both during individual interviews and focus groups sessions, thus;

*“Although we were sceptical funds availability at the commencement of program, subsequent counterpart payment from participating states and local governments assured our hopes in the continuation of the program activities”*

*“Those within the community that worked as construction workers testified that their dues were not only timely but well paid. This is an indication that funding was never a problem throughout”*

*“The health care facility built is well equipped with modern facilities”*

*“Training allowances earmarked for participants were paid on time and enough to cover the training expenses”*

The above responses captured during interviews and focus group sessions with informants is indicative that adequate and timely financial resources for the project motivated stakeholder participation in the program. Moreover, previous studies (Gachui, 2017; Arrossi, et al. 2014; Famakinwa, 2019) have shown that providing training and capacity-building opportunities for individuals and organizations involved in the decision-making and implementation process is important in attracting the interest of stakeholder's participation. This can include workshops, seminars, and training programs that focus on the principles and practices of stakeholder engagement. Additionally, encouraging the growth of essential resources, including capital and manpower, may also contribute to the success of stakeholder engagement programs.

### **Theme 3: Community Acceptance of the project**

As pointed out earlier, the study area – North-East is one of the least developed geo-political zones in Nigeria. Development indices have consistently shown that the region lack basic social and economic infrastructure. Education, water, health, transport and rural electrification being the CSDPs intervention areas clearly reflected the needs and aspirations of most communities in North-Eastern part of Nigeria. Information gathered in the course of this study indicated that any development initiative whose intervention areas hinges on the improvement of education, health, water, transport and electricity will easily garner the maximum support of participating communities towards the realization of its objectives. The reflection of communities' needs In the programs' intervention areas had motivated their participation in the program. Thus, informants expressed their acceptance of the projects in the following statements;

In an interview in one of the communities, an informant stated that;

*“You can see it yourself how families are fetching clean water from this new bore-hole, the community appreciation is immeasurable compared to when families had to trek several kilometres before getting water that is less hygienic than this one. He who intends to give you water must be attracted to you”*

*“Far has now come closer to us. The entire community is happy with the provision of this health facility. We gave our total support and contribution to ensure the success of this project and we will make sure that it remains functional because it is first of its kind in this community”*

*“Initial awareness and understanding of the benefits of stakeholder participation and the rights of community members had influenced understanding and support for the program.*

*This has greatly attracted interest of stakeholder's participation in the program”*

Empirical evidences (Butterfoss, 2001; Davids, 2012; Bell, 2012) abound to support the finding of this study in like-manner. It is generally established that when communities are actively involved in the identification, execution and evaluation of issues directly affecting them, there is always the tendency that the community will highly welcome such initiatives, and will assiduously work to ensure its successful implementation and sustainability.

### **Conclusion**

Internationally recognized development methodology known as "participatory development" entails actively including and engaging stakeholders in the design, execution, and assessment of development initiatives. It is well acknowledged that increased community ownership, sustainability, and project success result from stakeholder involvement in development initiatives. The main factors that motivated stakeholder participation leading to the success story of the program were found to include initial adequate and timely awareness of the program, availability of resources for its execution and general acceptance of the program's objectives by benefitting communities.

In conclusion, this study highlights the critical role of human and financial resources, access to information, and community acceptance in fostering stakeholder engagement in Community and social development projects. The availability of funds ensures that necessary activities were undertaken without financial constraints, thereby maintaining momentum and interest among stakeholders. Adequate information empowered stakeholders with the knowledge required to make informed decisions and contributions. Thus, enhancing the quality of stakeholder participation. Most importantly, community



acceptance of CSDP goals created a sense of ownership and alignment of interests, which was essential for sustained and meaningful involvement. Together, these factors create a conducive environment for stakeholders to actively participate and invest in the success of CSDP initiatives, ultimately leading to more effective and impactful outcomes.

### **Recommendations**

Based on findings of the study, the following recommendations became imperative with a view to promoting stakeholder participation in development initiatives;

1. Provision of adequate and timely human and financial resources to ensure steady implementation of program activities. This can be done through deployment of personnel possessing the necessary skills of community development work.
2. Designing and implementing intervention areas that clearly reflects the needs and aspirations of the target communities. This can be done through initial community assessment to identify the kind of interventions needed most by the communities.
3. Prior information and knowledge lead to awareness and is very critical not only towards the success of the development initiative, but also important in driving stakeholders' interest in the development process. Regular workshops and awareness campaigns would make a difference in this regard.

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