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ASSESSMENT OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN SELECTED RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS IN IMO STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed community participation in rural development projects implementation of the Imo State Oil Producing Areas Development Commission, Imo State Nigeria. Its specific objectives were to; describe the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents, identify the various rural development projects implemented by the commission in the area between the years 2010 and 2023, and ascertain the degree of participation of community members in the project implementation. Data collection instruments included; a structured questionnaire, in-depth interviews, participant observation, and reference documents. Purposive and simple random samplings were procedures employed for collecting data which were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistical tools. Findings in the study indicated that 58% of respondents were males. Adults within the age range of 41 – 60 years formed a greater number (42.5%) in the study. Approximately, 57% of respondents were married, and heads of households (88.3%) were males. Majority of the respondents (97.5%) were literate. An overwhelming majority of the respondents (85.8%) were Christians. A significant majority of respondents (98.30%) belonged to one community-based organization or the other. A greater number of the total projects (56.5%) embarked upon by the Commission (ISOPADEC) in the area were completed, 24.4% were ongoing while 13.9% were abandoned. The socioeconomic and cultural factors identified through regression results that influenced the effective implementation of rural development projects in the area included age, level of education, place of residence, occupation, level of income, and membership of the community-based organization.

INTRODUCTION

The challenge of rural development in Nigeria's economy is crucial, cogent, and urgent as described by Eboh (1995). There are critical social problems that require immediate attention for solutions through a more pragmatic approach. They include those of widespread poverty, illiteracy, and human misery in most rural communities. Okonkwo (2009), posits that most rural communities in Nigeria are endowed with natural resources which are rather used to develop the urban cities to the detriment of the rural areas that are the resource base. Considering the importance of rural areas, Aroh (2010), emphatically states that the role of rural society in national development or nation-building cannot be overlooked. This is a fact, especially in the less developed countries where agriculture is one of the economic resource bases. The rural areas are blessed with a large land mass, a conducive ecological environment, fertile land, and a sufficient labour force. Nwachukwu (2003), asserts that it is in villages rather than in the urban settings that about 85 % of the Africans live. This shows that it is these rural dwellers, at least 70 % of them that provide necessary labour for economic activities. Obviously, resources (human and material) abound in the rural areas.

Despite concerted efforts and decades of development plans for the rural sector, rural communities are still prone to underdevelopment, and in spite the huge resources committed into rural development programmes by the government and international donor agencies, rural communities appear to have remained relatively undeveloped (Nwachukwu, 2018). Situation of social problems seem to worsen on daily bases, especially in rural communities.

The issue is the get-rich-quick syndrome which has negated the actual role of local leaders in serving their people. The quest to amass wealth and become godfathers makes local leaders sacrifice their personalities for money. In other words, funds meant for development projects are embezzled and diverted into personal use. When this negative attitude is observed, people begin to look at their leaders with distrust. They become resentful and cynical about them. As they grow dissatisfied with leadership, the conflict will set in, the people's motivation and morale will plummet and this will adversely affect the level of participation.

On an average assessment, various rural development policies and programmes in Nigeria are well intentioned but bureaucratic bottlenecks plagued their proper implementation (National Planning Commission, 2000).

The Imo State Oil Producing Areas Development Commission (ISOPADEC) is an interventionist agency established to initiate and implement rural development projects in the oil-producing communities of the State. Considering the clustering issues enumerated above, this research is poised to critically examine intervention modalities of the Imo State Oil Producing Areas Development Commission (ISOPADEC) as an agency charged with the responsibility of implementing rural development projects in the various oil producing communities in the State.

The broad objective of this study was to assess the level of community participation in rural development project implementation of the ISOPADEC in oil-producing communities of the State.

The specific objectives were to;

1. ascertain the socio-economic characteristics of respondents in the study area.
2. identify the various rural development projects implemented by the commission in the area between 2010 and 2023.
3. ascertain the degree of participation of community members in the project implementation.

METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out in Imo State Nigeria. The State is one of the 36 States of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The State is presently made up of 27 Local Government Areas, which are politically zoned into three namely; Orlu, Owerri, and Okigwe. Out of the 27 Local Government Areas in Imo State, 3 are naturally blessed with oil and gas mineral resources. They are; Ohaji/Egbema, Oguta, and Oru East Local Government Areas. Consequently, the Imo State Oil Producing Areas Development Commission (ISOPADEC) was established. The population comprised all the oil producing communities of Imo State.

In each of the 3 oil producing LGAs in the State, namely, 40 respondents were selected, 10 from each of the various confederated bodies in the following proportion; 10 respondents from the Council of Traditional Rulers, 10 from the Town Union, 10 from the Women Wing, 10 from the youth body. Out of the ten respondents in each group, eight were selected by balloting (simple random sampling) while chairpersons and secretaries of the various wings were selected through purposive sampling. A total of 120 respondents were used for the study.

The level of local participation in project implementation was valued with; 5 for very great extent (VGE), 4 for great extent (GE), 3 for little extent (LIE), 2 for less extent (LEE), and 1 for least extent (LEA). The maximum value was 5, and the minimum value was 1. The average was 3 which was taken as the cut-off point for assessing effectiveness. Any variable rated greater than or equal to (>) 3 was regarded as being effective while variable less than (<) 3 was regarded as not being effective. The mean score of 3.0 was calculated as shown below.

$$\frac{5+4+3+2+1}{5} = \frac{15}{5} = 3$$

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Personal Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1 shows that a majority (58.3%) of respondents were male, while the female accounted for 41.7%. One outstanding thing indicated in this result is that representation cuts across gender. The majority of the respondents were in the age range between 21 – 40 (38.3%) and 41 – 60 years (42.5%) respectively. Respondents below 21 years were 7.5% and those above 60 years were 11.7% of the sample size.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by personal characteristics

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Sex		
Male	70	58.3
Female	50	4.7
Total	120	100.0
Age in years		
20 and below	9	7.5
21 - 40	46	38.3
41 - 60	51	42.5
61 and above	14	11.7
Total	120	100.00
Marital Status		
Married	68	56.7
Single	31	25.8
Divorced	7	5.8
Widow	14	11.7
Total	120	100.0
Household head		
Male	106	88.3
Female	14	11.7
Total	120	100.0
Education level		
No formal education	3	2.5
First school leaving certificate	8	6.7
WAEC or its equivalent	24	20.0

Teachers Grade II, NCE, OND	51	42.5
HND and University degree	34	28.3
Total	120	100.0
Religion		
Christianity	103	85.8
African Traditional Religion	17	14.2
Moslem	-	-
Others	-	-
Total	120	100.0
Membership in a community-based organization		
Member	118	98.3
Non-member	02	1.7
Total	120	100.0

Source: Field Survey 2023.

A greater percentage of respondents within the age group of 21 – 40 years and 41- 60 years respectively could be attributed to the fact that they were middle-aged adults who were active, experienced, and more enthusiastic in community participation in rural development activities. A greater number of respondents (56.7%) were married, while 25.8% were single, 5.8% were divorced, and 11.7 were widowed. Also, **the** majority of households (88.3%) were headed by males.

A significant proportion of the respondents (97.5%) had formal education ranging from primary, secondary, and tertiary education hence, were literate and could read and write. Only 2.5% of the respondents had no formal education.

A greater proportion (40%) were occupationally farmers, 26.7% of them were traders, while 38.3% of them earned between N20,000 and N49,000 as monthly income. Also, the overwhelming majority of the respondents (98.3%) belonged to one community-based organization or the other, while an insignificant minority (1.7%) of them indicated non-membership.

Rural Development Projects Sponsored and Implemented by The Imo State Oil Producing Areas Development Commission From 2010 – 2023.

The Imo State Oil Producing Areas Development Commission embarked on a number of rural development and poverty alleviation projects since its inception. Projects assessed were those implemented from year 2010 to 2023. The status of those projects in terms of the level of work done, the ones completed and sustained, those ongoing, and those abandoned is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Level of rural development projects executed by the Imo State Oil Producing Areas Development Commission in the study area from 2010 – 2023.

Project	Frequency	On-going	Completed	Abandoned
Water (borehole, hand pump, etc)	14	6	5	3
Rural road construction	12	3	7	2
Market stall	16	5	7	4
Rural electrification	9	5	3	1
Primary health care	5	-	5	-
Town hall	-	-	-	-
School blocks	32	5	27	-
Motor park	-	-	-	-
Rural cottage industries	7	2	1	4
Resource/skills acquisition centres	6	3	2	1
Police station/security outpost	5	2	3	-
Bus stop	14	4	10	-
Community farm project	9	3	3	3
Others (specify)	-	-	-	-
Total	**129**	**38**	**73**	**18**

Source: Field Survey 2023

Table 2 indicates that the total number of projects initiated by the Imo State Oil Producing Areas Development Commission between the years 2010 and 2023 in its catchment areas was 129. Out of this number, 73 (56.6%) were successfully implemented, 38(29.5%) were ongoing, and 18 (13.9%) were abandoned. One can draw an inference from this result and conclude that rural development activities as initiated by the Commission were on the increase. These efforts are in line with the commission's mission statement on applying an integrated approach to reduce poverty in the area.

Level of Participation of Males and Females at Various Stages of Project Implementation

Table 3 Mean distribution on level of participation of respondents at various stages of project implementation

		Male		Female	
S/No	**Variable**	**Mean (x)**	**Remark**	**Mean (x)**	**Remark**
1	Need assessment	4.32	great extent	4.46	Great extent
2	Decision on project selection	4.32	Great extent	4.12	Great extent
3	Attendance to meeting	4.61	Great extent	4.01	Great extent
4	Planning of the project	4.15	Great extent	3.86	Great extent
5	Financial contribution	3.26	Great extent	3.92	Great extent
6	Technical support	3.94	Great extent	3.64	Great extent
7	Labour at the project site	3.62	Great extent	4.38	Great extent
8	Security at the project site	4.01	Great extent	4.12	Great extent
9	General supervision/Monitoring of activities	4.41	Great extent	3.81	Great extent
10	Giving progress report	3.84	Great extent	4.67	Great extent
11	General evaluation	3.73	Great extent	3.51	Great extent
12	General maintenance	3.51	Great extent	4.02	Great extent
13	Other services for sustainability	3.92	Great extent	3.53	Great extent
	Sum of mean	52.15		51.05	
	Grand mean	**4.01**		**3.93**	

Source: Field Survey 2023

With reference to the data collected and analyzed in Table 3, one can relatively compare the level of participation of the male and female gender (Community members) at various stages of project implementation. Results from the tables indicated that both the male and the female members of the Community actively participated in the projects. ranging from the conceptualization, planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and other maintenance services for sustainability.

Male participants had an overall mean score of 4.01 while female participants had a mean score of 3.93. It was therefore an established fact that the level of participation of gender in those projects was not different.

This result has proved that women in this present dispensation are rising up to development challenges, despite gender disparity. This could be associated with incessant campaigns on gender equality. The result again confirmed the assertion of Akpabio (2005), and Obasi (2005), that “no meaningful development can occur without women who make up more than half of the rural population.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study concluded that a good number of the projects were successfully executed as a result of the active participation of community members. They were need-driven and community-driven. The study also revealed that socio-economic variables influenced people's participation in rural development projects. Also, there existed no gender disparity in participating in ISOPADEC development projects, It was therefore recommended that development agencies such as ISOPADEC should use the bottom-top approach in driving rural development projects,

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