

GOVERNMENTS' ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVES: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine governments' engagement initiatives, challenges and opportunities in community development in Cross River State, Nigeria. Three research questions were raised with three objectives. There were 372 participants in the study sampled from six communities (three rural and three urban), one from each senatorial district and descriptive research method was used. A 20-item validated questionnaire ($\alpha = 0.86$) titled "Governments' Engagement Initiatives in Community Development Questionnaire" (GEICDQ) was used for data collection. Descriptive statistics using mean and standard deviation were used to answer the study questions. The creation of recreation centres, human capacity building, skill acquisition programmes, scholarships, and the provision of social amenities were among the basic interventions that were identified. The obstacles linked to these interventions included irregularities, dishonesty, insufficient financial support, absence of oversight, and inadequate upkeep of finished interventions. However, there were also prospects for community development, such growth of social capital, human capacity building, public office holders' trust, and community leaders' trust. Among the solutions put forth includes the necessity of government interventions for community development to be implemented and sustained.

Keywords: Government, Interventions, Community, Development, Opportunities

Introduction

Improving the standard of living in a community is the main objective of community development which is a continuous process. The development of social networks, the fortification of neighbourhood ties, and the emergence of community-based organisations that support

long-term problem-solving abilities are the means by which this advancement is achieved (Rubin & Rubin, 2001). One generally held belief is that in order to establish a balanced, ongoing, and sustainable development process through effective power structures, such as

leadership, any community development project must prioritize both individual and economic progress. The roles of community leaders (government) and their actions in fostering community development have been the subject of numerous pieces of community development literature (Ugboh, 2007; Zaharah & Abu, 2008; Ozor & Nwankwo, 2008; Ironbar & Bassey, 2018). One could argue that a community without strong leadership would find it difficult to influence community development initiatives or gather resources. Strong leadership is essential to enabling communities to effectively take on and oversee such projects, (Ironbar, Ilari, & Ekpenyong, 2020). Among the community development initiatives which government of Cross River State intervene in include building of roads, water supply facilities, health centres, maternity homes, town halls and community libraries. These initiatives are no doubt necessary for the development of human potential and acquisition of leadership skills.

In studies by Udensi, et al (2012) and Ironbar, Uba, & Obibessong, (2023), community leadership and the challenges of community development in Nigeria is a twixt. They posit that a paramount government's community development goals is to assist local children in acquiring skills. However, the possibility of maintaining community initiatives is primarily difficult. Udensi et al. (2012) identified several fundamental challenges, including lack of funding (80.7%), leader's lack of interest in a community development project (75.8%), disagreement between community leaders and members (75.3%), community leader's failure to include community members in the project's planning and execution (74.7%), and discrimination against women in leadership roles (70.4%). The Odukpani

Local Government in Cross River State, Nigeria, served as a case study for a study by Ebong, Ekpenyong, and Akpan (2018) that looked at self-help initiatives as a means of promoting the economic development of rural residents. A sample size of 200 people was chosen via stratified random selection. Two hypotheses were tested using the one-sample T-test. The study's findings showed that farming was a significant self-help tactic for the economic growth of the people living in Cross River State's Odukpani Local Government Area, and that it was encouraged by the government. Cooperative society activities also constituted a major self-help tactic for the economic progress of the same residents. The primary issue was that rural residents and communities were not participating more actively in the economy. However, there were opportunities to help the community by utilising nearby resources. (Ebong and others, 2018).

Beyond the Conventional Development Approaches: Evolving and Institutionalising the Strategic Framework for Sustainable Wealth Creation and Development in Odukpani Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria is the title of a study conducted in 2019 by Nnamani, Enyiazu, Nwoke, Ochiaka, Agbo, and Ovaga. Interviews regarding the topic were conducted with community stakeholders. The generated data were examined, then narratively presented. The study discovered that while the government employs ways for acquiring skills to build communities, a significant obstacle was the dishonesty of coordinators. Agboeze et al. (2021) carried out a study in the Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State, Nigeria, to look into the role of local government in community development. There were 420 participants in the study. The 420 participants in the sample

consisted of 200 community development officers selected at random from the study region and 200 adult educators from Enugu State. Data were gathered using a 21-item structured questionnaire created by the researchers. The means and standard deviations were used to solve the research difficulties. Funds allotted by the government to the appropriate local government departments were not always received in a timely manner to enable the successful execution of community development projects, according to a study on the challenges facing government interventions in community development in the twenty-first century. The study concluded that in order to ensure that local government area legislation have checks and balances, a higher monitoring body needs to be established (Agboeze et al., 2021).

Statement of the problem

The state government intervenes in community development programmes through a range of initiatives, including building roads, water supply facilities, health centres, maternity homes, town halls, community libraries necessary developing human potential and acquiring skills in various communities. But, these were not without obstacles hindering effective execution of these government initiatives, especially in rural areas where there were issues with inadequate infrastructure. The difference in project completion rates was one of the enduring issues. Uneven development resulted from some projects being abandoned while others were finished on time. Matters were further compounded by political interference and financial malfeasance. A lack of funding, differences in income, and societal injustices were noted as the main obstacles to advancement. Contrary to what should ideally happen, political interests frequently prevented

chances for growth from being realised. The recruitment and training of community development officers with access to technical and financial resources was seen to be catalyst for preventing the obstacles and advancing grassroots development. Despite the availability of these officers and their statutory roles, these obstacles still persist. This calls for the need to examine the challenges and opportunities of governments' engagement initiatives in community development in Cross River State, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

Examining government initiatives in community development in the twenty-first century, as well as the opportunities and problems they present in Cross River State, Nigeria, is the main goal of the study. The objectives are to:

1. identify the current and completed government initiatives in Cross River State aimed at community development;
2. ascertain the difficulties associated with government involvement in community development in the state of Cross River; and,
3. determine the potential avenues for government involvement in community development within the state of Cross River.

Research Questions

1. What are the existing/implemented government interventions towards community development in Cross River State?
2. What are the challenges behind government interventions in community development in Cross River State?
3. What are opportunities for government interventions in

community development in Cross River State?

Methodology

The study employed a descriptive research design to examine the prospects and limitations of government interventions in community development in Cross River State, Nigeria, in the twenty-first century. The sample of the study comprise 372 participants selected in each senatorial district. Sixty-two respondents were selected from each senatorial district's rural and urban communities to make up the 372 participants. Hence, six communities - three rural and three urban - were selected. Purposive sampling was used to select the respondents, whereas simple random sampling was used to select the communities. A 20-item questionnaire entitled Governments' Engagement

Initiatives in Community Development Questionnaire (GEICDQ) was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by three University of Calabar professionals who worked in the departments of public health and test and measurement. In a pilot study, twenty (20) Idomi community members who were not part of the survey population were selected. The interval between the two administrations of the pilot instrument was two weeks. The set of the two scores was correlated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) statistics. The correlation coefficient of 0.86 was obtained. This demonstrated the reliability of the instrument. The mean and standard deviation were used to answer the study questions. Any item with a mean score of 2.50 or more was considered to be at the acceptance level, and those with a score below 2.50 were rejected.

Results

Table 1: Mean responses of existing and implemented government interventions towards community development (n=372)

S/N	Item statements	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Standard Deviation	Decision
1	Provision of creational centers	235	93	32	12	3.5	0.79	SA
2	Human capacity building	232	96	34	10	3.5	0.77	SA
3	Skills acquisition	246	81	26	19	3.5	0.84	SA
4	Scholarships	220	99	32	21	3.4	0.87	A
5	Social amenities	249	103	17	3	3.6	0.62	SA
	Cluster Mean					3.5	0.778	SA

Note: SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree

The result displayed in Table 1 showed the mean answers and standard deviation of the government interventions for community

development that are now in place or have been implemented in Cross River State. The results show that Items 1 through 5

represented the government's current and completed community development activities in Cross River State. The respondents agreed with the grand cluster mean of 3.5, which indicated that all the items represented government activities for community development in Cross River State. The grand cluster value of 0.778 for the standard deviation indicated that the responses of the respondents were

distributed around the mean. Thus, it is interesting to see that five of the development effects listed in Table 1 are covered by government programmes that support community development. The data in the table also revealed that most respondents believed the government had done an excellent job of supporting community development activities, which is part of their role to successfully handle community development requirements.

TABLE 2: Mean responses of challenges behind government interventions and community development (n=372)

S/N	Item statements	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Standard Deviation	Decision
6	Inconsistency in the interventions	189	98	25	60	3.1	1.10	SA
7	Corruption	210	87	34	41	3.3	1.02	SA
8	Poor funding	157	57	14	14	2.6	1.36	SA
9	Poor supervision	167	49	27	12	2.7	1.35	SA
10	Poor maintenance of completed interventions	231	91	19	31	3.4	0.92	SA
Cluster Mean						3.02	1.15	SA

Note: SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree.

The result in Table 2 showed the standard deviation and mean answers to questions about the difficulties associated with community development and government interventions in Cross River State. The results showed that the challenges related to community development and government interventions in Cross River State were accurately reflected by Items 6 through 10. The grand cluster mean of 3.02 indicated that all participants agreed that each item accurately represented the challenges related to community development and governmental interventions in the state of Cross River. The grand cluster score of 1.15

for the standard deviation indicated that the respondents' responses were clustered around the mean. Therefore, it is interesting to note that the five items in table 2's list corresponded to the challenges that Cross River State has in relation to community development and government interventions. The information in the table also demonstrated that the majority of respondents agreed that the gradual, insufficient maintenance of finished treatments has been the most barrier to the interventions. Nevertheless, corruption was one of the concerns brought forward by study participants.

Table 3: Mean responses of opportunities for government interventions and community development (n=372)

S/ N	Item statements	SA	A	D	SD	Mea n	Standar d Deviatio n	Decisio n
11	Community development	213	74	37	48	3.2	1.07	SA
12	Human capacity building	212	91	59	10	3.4	0.84	SA
13	Social capital development	271	16	29	56	3.3	1.14	SA
14	Trust on political and public office holders	251	71	32	18	3.5	0.85	SA
15	Trust on community leaders	209	50	41	64	3.1	1.20	A
Cluster Mean						3.3	1.02	SA

Note: SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree

The result for government interventions and community development possibilities in Cross River State in Table 3 along with the standard deviation and mean showed that Items 11 through 15 of the findings, suggesting that Cross River State has prospects for both governmental participation and community development. The grand cluster mean of 3.3 indicated that all of the categories point to opportunities for government interventions and community development in Cross River State, as reported by the respondents. The grand cluster score of 1.02 for the standard deviation indicated that the respondents' replies were clustered around the mean. Therefore, it is interesting to see that Cross River State has opportunities for government and community development initiatives that tackle the five goals listed in Table 3. The data in the table indicate that most respondents thought that government efforts have a significant chance of fostering the development of social capital. The second step was to boost public trust in those holding political and public office.

Discussion of Findings

The results of this study demonstrated the current and implemented government

initiatives aimed at promoting community development in Cross River State, such as the establishment of creational centres, the development of human capacity, the acquisition of skills, scholarship, and social amenities. This illustrates the reality that the government implements fundamental interventions that are geared towards community development. This finding is consistent with that of Ozor and Nwankwo (2008), who claimed that the provision of social amenities is one government intervention in community development. This is consistent with the conclusion reached by Udensi et al. (2012) that the establishment of leisure centres will foster community development and that it is the duty of both the state and the people to see to it that this occurs. Ugboh (2007) also stated that the availability of educational and medical facilities, as well as the sustained execution of interventions like human capacity building, are essential to the development of communities. The results of this study also demonstrated that inconsistencies in the interventions conducted in the study region, corruption, inadequate money, inadequate monitoring, and poor maintenance of completed

interventions were among the issues impeding government interventions and community development in Cross River State. The majority of the interventions lack sustainability, consistency, and maintenance, which is a consequence of these findings. This is supported by the findings of Ebong et al. (2018), who claimed that rural households' and communities' lack of proactive participation in economic advancement to aid in upkeep was one of the key obstacles to government intervention for community development. This finding is consistent with that of Nnamani et al. (2019), who found that while the government employed measures for skill acquisition to foster community development, but coordinators' dishonesty posed significant obstacles. This finding aligns with the findings of Udensi et al. (2012), who found that funding scarcity, leaders' disinterest in a community development project, conflict between a leader and member of the community, the leaders' failure to involve the community members in the project's planning and execution, and discrimination against women in leadership roles were the main barriers to government interventions. This conclusion is further supported by the study conducted by Agboeze et al. (2021), which showed that the budget allocation that the government sends to the relevant local government departments is not always received as and when it is due for the successful implementation of community development initiatives. It was concluded that a higher monitoring authority should be assigned in order to monitor and supervise the existence of checks and balances between the legislation of the local government districts.

Further research revealed that the following areas in Cross River State offered

opportunities for government interventions and community development: social capital development, human capacity building, community development, political and public office holders' trust, and community leaders' trust. This suggested that community development initiatives can have a significant positive impact on the growth of communities and the well-being of its members. Udensi et al. (2012), who claimed that community interventions aid in the development of communities and link them to other communities, can support this study. This result is consistent with that of Ebong et al. (2018), who found that one of the government's interventions for community development is skill acquisition for young people living in the neighbourhood, which gives them the chance to grow as individuals. On the other hand, the study discovered that one of the potentials is to use community-based resources for community development, community maintenance, or community service.

Conclusion

This study was able to identify the fundamental government initiatives for community development in Cross River State, as well as the opportunities and challenges that came with them. The results of this study suggest that government interventions are required for community development. It makes it possible for communities to grow and compete with one another. The main issues with these interventions, nevertheless, have been corruption and inconsistent projects or interventions.

Recommendations

It is impossible to overstate the significance of government involvement in community development. The study's conclusions led to the following recommendations being made:

1. Politicians and government officials in positions of power should try to enhance the lives and communities they represent by implementing at least one intervention centred on community development.
2. In order to entrust it to their care, community members must be involved in community initiatives. It might be safe from vandalism in this way.
3. It is important for community people to take initiative and defend local initiatives that are carried out inside their areas.
4. The interventions must continue through strict oversight and responsibility.

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