

Youth's Participation in Community and Social Development Project (CSDP) In Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study examined youth's participation in the Community and Social Development Project (CSDP) in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Specifically, assessed their level of awareness regarding CSDP, explored their perceptions of these projects and examined the extent of their participation in CSDP. A multi-stage sampling procedure was employed to select 150 respondents from three Local Government Areas (Nsit Ubium, Oruk Anam, and Onna), using structured questionnaires to collect data. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and means, along with factor analysis, were utilized to analyze the data. Youth's awareness of CSDP was high with cluster mean of 4.33, with the highest awareness of being Skill Acquisition and Empowerment Projects (mean = 2.57). while the perception that youth involvement is essential for project success was strongly agreed upon (mean = 3.13). However, youth participation was highest in promoting CSDP activities (mean = 2.40), and lowest in monitoring project outcomes (mean = 1.90). The study concluded that youth involvement is vital for the success and sustainability of CSDP, and recommended that increased access to information and resources be provided to further enhance youth engagement in these development projects.

Keywords: youth, participation, Community and Social Development Project

1. Introduction

The Community and Social Development Project (CSDP) is an initiative in Nigeria aimed at addressing grassroots socio-economic challenges. Building on earlier programmes like the Community Based Poverty Reduction Project (CPRP) and the Local Empowerment and Environmental Management Project (LEEMP), CSDP follows a community-driven development (CDD) approach that empowers local communities to identify, plan, and execute projects that meet their specific needs (Bukar et al., 2022). The program, supported by the World Bank, operates across 29 states, including Akwa Ibom, with the goal of improving access to social and infrastructure services (Ochepo et al., 2019; Adejoh, 2015).

In Akwa Ibom State, the CSDP was established in 2009, with operations beginning in 2010. The state agency facilitates projects, providing financial and technical support to communities, while emphasizing local ownership and sustainability (AKSCSDP, 2023). Since its inception, the CSDP has impacted 189 communities and vulnerable groups through interventions in education, health,

water, transport, and socio-economic development. These projects have significantly improved infrastructure and services in rural areas, contributing to community empowerment (AKSCSDP, 2023). Youth participation is crucial for the success and sustainability of CSDP projects. However, various factors such as awareness, socio-economic conditions, and perceptions influence their involvement (Owolabi, 2018). Engaging youth not only enhances the projects but also empowers them with valuable skills and experiences for personal growth and community leadership.

2. Statement of the Research Problem

Youth participation in Community and Social Development Projects (CSDP) is essential for ensuring the sustainability and success of community-driven initiatives. Despite the recognized importance of youth engagement, their participation remains inconsistent and often limited in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. This is due to factors such as lack of awareness, socio-cultural constraints, and insufficient opportunities for meaningful involvement in decision-making processes (Udoma, et al 2023; Owolabi, 2018). Udoma et al (2023) further highlighted the potential of youth volunteerism in community development. Etuk et al (2018) assessed Youth's Participation of Community Development Activities of West Africa Agricultural Productivity program me in Akwa Ibom State Nigeria. None of studies focused on youth participation in CSDP in Akwa Ibom State. Existing literature has not adequately addressed youth perceptions of CSDP or factors affecting CSDP (Obar et al., 2017). Therefore, this study seeks to fill these gaps by examining the awareness, perceptions, and factors affecting youth participation in CSDP within Akwa Ibom State.

3. Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study was to examine youth's participation in Community and Social Development Project (CSDP) in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The specific objectives were to:

- i. assess the level of awareness among youth regarding Community and Social Development Projects (CSDP) in Akwa Ibom State;
- ii. examine the perception of youth towards community and social development projects in Akwa Ibom State;
- iii. examine the level of youth's participation in Community and Social Development Projects in Akwa Ibom State

4. Theoretical Framework

The study adopts the Community Driven Development (CDD) Theory, which emphasizes community participation in decision-making and development processes. Proposed by Mansuri and Rao (2004), CDD argues that when communities, including youth, are involved in planning and implementing projects, development initiatives are more sustainable and effective. The theory promotes community ownership, participatory decision-making, and local capacity building, aligning well with the objectives of Community and Social Development Projects (CSDP) in Nigeria (Odishika & Liadi, 2016).

In the context of this study, CDD is particularly relevant as youth involvement in community development is essential for the long-term success of CSDP. By integrating youth in the decision-making process, projects can leverage their energy, creativity, and unique perspectives, resulting in more innovative and impactful outcomes (Obar, Adekoya & Nkwocha, 2017). Empirical studies, such as those by Ochepe, Ejembi, and Jiriko (2019), highlight that CDD-based projects in Nigeria have seen improved ownership and sustainability due to active community involvement, including youth. CDD provides a robust framework for enhancing youth participation in CSDP by focusing on community ownership and participatory processes, both critical for sustainable development outcomes in Akwa Ibom State.

5. Methodology

The study was conducted in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, a region known for its diverse ethnic composition and significant economic contributions. Akwa Ibom State is situated in the coastal South-Southern part of Nigeria lying between latitudes $4^{\circ} 32'$ and $5^{\circ} 33'$ North and Longitudes $7^{\circ} 25'$ and $8^{\circ} 25'$ East. Akwa Ibom State is bounded on the North by Abia State on the East by Cross River State, on the West by Rivers and the Abia State, on the South by the Atlantic Ocean and the Southern end of Cross Rivers State (Etuk and Umoh, 2014). The target population comprised youths aged 18 to 35 years residing in three purposively selected Local Government Areas (LGAs): Nsit Ubium, Oruk Anam, and ONNA. These LGAs were chosen due to their active participation in Community and Social Development Projects (CSDP). Two communities were randomly selected from each LGA, and 25 youths were randomly selected from each of the six communities, resulting in a total sample size of 150 respondents.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to gather information on socioeconomic characteristics, awareness, perceptions, participation levels, and factors affecting youth participation in CSDP. The questionnaire's validity was ensured through expert reviews for content and face validity, while reliability was assessed using the test-retest method and Cronbach's alpha for internal consistency. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentages, and means were used to analyze the data.

6. Results and Discussion

Level of Awareness among Youth Regarding CSDP

The findings of this study, as indicated in Table 2, highlight the level of awareness among youth regarding various Community and Social Development Projects (CSDP) in Akwa Ibom State. Among the project types, Water Supply Projects had the highest level of awareness with a mean score of 2.53, followed closely by Skill Acquisition and Empowerment Projects (mean =2.57), and Vulnerable Group Support Projects (mean=2.40). On the other hand, Orphanage and Child Welfare Projects (mean=1.93), Rural Electrification Projects (mean=1.97), and Road and Transport Infrastructure Projects (mean =1.97) exhibited the lowest levels of awareness.

These results indicate that awareness is particularly high for projects that have a direct and tangible impact on daily life, such as water supply and skill acquisition. This could suggest that youth are more cognizant of projects that are immediately relevant to their personal and community well-being. Nelson et al. (2021) also found that participation in water and sanitation interventions significantly influenced awareness and engagement, as water is a fundamental need in most rural and semi-urban areas. This consistency suggests that the findings of this study align with existing research, affirming that essential infrastructure projects are often more visible and thus command higher awareness among the youth population.

Conversely, the low awareness of Orphanage and Child Welfare Projects as well as Road and Transport Infrastructure Projects might indicate a gap in communication or outreach efforts by the agencies responsible for these initiatives. Hassan (2023) also observed that socioeconomic factors play a crucial role in youth participation in community projects, implying that awareness and participation might be hindered by external challenges such as lack of access to information, lower prioritization of these projects by the youth, or perceived irrelevance to their immediate needs.

The lower awareness regarding Rural Electrification Projects might reflect inadequate infrastructural development in these areas, which aligns with findings from Usman et al. (2018), who observed that infrastructure projects in rural areas of Nigeria often face greater challenges in dissemination and implementation due to logistical and resource-related difficulties. This could point to the need for improved communication strategies and community engagement to ensure that youth, who are crucial stakeholders in development, are adequately informed about the various initiatives that could benefit them and their communities.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents based on level of awareness regarding CSDP (n=150)

Project Type	Not aware F (%)	Somewhat aware F (%)	Very aware F (%)	Mean	Rank
Educational Infrastructure Projects	30 (20.0)	45 (30.0)	75 (50.0)	2.30	3
Health Services Improvement Projects	40 (26.7)	50 (33.3)	60 (40.0)	2.13	5
Water Supply Projects	20 (13.3)	30 (20.0)	100 (66.7)	2.53	1
Rural Electrification Projects	45 (30.0)	65 (43.3)	40 (26.7)	1.97	7
Road and Transport Infrastructure Projects	50 (33.3)	55 (36.7)	45 (30.0)	1.97	7
Environmental Sustainability Projects	35 (23.3)	45 (30.0)	70 (46.7)	2.23	4
Vulnerable Group Support Projects	20 (13.3)	50 (33.3)	80 (53.3)	2.40	3
Skill Acquisition and Empowerment Projects	15 (10.0)	35 (23.3)	100 (66.7)	2.57	2
Agricultural Development Projects	30 (20.0)	50 (33.3)	70 (46.7)	2.27	4
Orphanage and Child Welfare Projects	50 (33.3)	60 (40.0)	40 (26.7)	1.93	10
Cluster Mean				2.33	

Critical Value = 2.0

Source: Field data (2024)

Perception of Youth Towards CSDP

The perception of youth towards the Community and Social Development Project (CSDP) in Akwa Ibom State, as reflected in Table 3, shows the highest mean scores in the following areas: the belief that youth involvement in CSDP is essential for its success (Mean = 3.13), the perception that CSDP projects offer valuable opportunities for youth development (Mean = 3.07), and the view that the community benefits from youth participation in CSDP (Mean = 3.03). On the other hand, the lowest mean scores indicate that youths believe the government provides inadequate support for CSDP initiatives (Mean = 2.30), the implementation of CSDP is not well-organized or effective (Mean = 2.67), and there are concerns about the sustainability of the projects and their potential benefits for future youth (Mean = 2.67).

The results indicate that youth in Akwa Ibom State hold a generally positive perception of their involvement in the CSDP, with high levels of agreement that their participation is crucial for the success of these projects, and that the projects offer important opportunities for their development. These findings align with the study by Adi et al. (2022), which emphasizes the importance of youth participation in community-driven initiatives for project success. In Taraba State, similar patterns were observed, with youth participation being a key factor in the sustainability and effectiveness of CSDP efforts.

However, despite these positive perceptions, there are concerns regarding the adequacy of government support for CSDP, as well as doubts about the sustainability and organization of the projects. These findings are consistent with the study by Okereke-Ejiogu et al. (2015), which highlights inadequate governmental support and poor organizational structures as significant challenges to the success of CSDP in other parts of Nigeria, including Imo State. This suggests a nationwide issue concerning the need for stronger governmental engagement and better planning to ensure the long-term success of community-based development projects.

The perception that CSDP projects offer valuable opportunities for youth development, supported by a mean score of 3.07, is echoed in the findings of Iwuchukwu et al. (2015). Their study on youth roles in rural community development in Ebonyi State demonstrates the positive outcomes of youth involvement in similar projects, particularly in terms of skill acquisition and empowerment. These opportunities are critical, especially in regions where youth unemployment and underemployment are prevalent, as noted by Oge (2023) in a study on skill acquisition programs for youth in Ebonyi State. In contrast, the relatively low mean scores for government support (2.30) and project sustainability (2.67) raise concerns about the long-term viability of CSDP efforts in Akwa Ibom State. These concerns are in line with the findings of Odenigbo et al. (2022), who identified similar issues in rural water scheme projects in Enugu State, where limited government backing hindered the success and sustainability of community development efforts. Thus, for the CSDP in Akwa Ibom to fully realize its potential, there is a need for enhanced government involvement and strategic planning.

Table 3: Distribution of respondents based on perception towards CSDP (n=150)

Statement	Strongly Disagree F (%)	Disagree F (%)	Agree F (%)	Strongly Agree F (%)	Mean
CSDP projects address the needs of my community.	15 (10.0)	25 (16.7)	70 (46.7)	40 (26.7)	2.90
Youth involvement in CSDP is essential for its success.	10 (6.7)	20 (13.3)	60 (40.0)	60 (40.0)	3.13
The implementation of CSDP is well-organized and effective.	25 (16.7)	30 (20.0)	65 (43.3)	30 (20.0)	2.67
CSDP projects have improved the living standards in my community.	15 (10.0)	25 (16.7)	70 (46.7)	40 (26.7)	2.90
CSDP projects offer valuable opportunities for youth development.	10 (6.7)	25 (16.7)	60 (40.0)	55 (36.7)	3.07
I believe the projects are sustainable and will benefit future youth.	20 (13.3)	40 (26.7)	60 (40.0)	30 (20.0)	2.67
The government provides adequate support for CSDP initiatives.	40 (26.7)	50 (33.3)	35 (23.3)	25 (16.7)	2.30
CSDP encourages youth to take leadership roles in development projects	15 (10.0)	30 (20.0)	65 (43.3)	40 (26.7)	2.87
The community benefits from youth participation in CSDP.	10 (6.7)	25 (16.7)	65 (43.3)	50 (33.3)	3.03
CSDP has contributed positively to the overall development of Akwa Ibom.	20 (13.3)	30 (20.0)	60 (40.0)	40 (26.7)	2.80
Cluster Mean					2.84

Critical Value = 2.5

Source: Field data (2024)

Level of Youth's Participation in CSDP

In analyzing the level of youth participation in the Community and Social Development Project (CSDP) in Akwa Ibom State, the data revealed significant variations across different activities, as seen in Table 4. The top three activities with the highest mean scores, indicating the highest levels of youth participation, were promoting CSDP activities in the community (mean = 2.40), involvement in project execution (mean = 2.33), and volunteering for CSDP-related activities and organizing or leading CSDP initiatives (both with a mean of 2.27). Conversely, the three activities with the lowest mean scores, reflecting the lowest levels of youth participation, were participating in monitoring CSDP projects (mean = 1.90), providing feedback on CSDP project outcomes (mean = 1.93), and engaging with government officials for CSDP (mean = 2.03). Cluster mean of 2.14 was above the critical mean value of 2.00 which is an indication that the participation level of youth in CSDP was high,

These findings suggest that youth in Akwa Ibom State are more inclined to participate in direct, hands-on roles such as promoting and executing CSDP activities, which aligns with the study by

Udensi et al. (2019) on youth participation in community development programs in Cross River State, where youth engagement was also prominent in practical, action-oriented tasks. This reflects a general trend where youth are motivated by visible, tangible outcomes, as observed in other studies on youth participation in development projects (Hassan, 2023; Sidi et al., 2020). The high participation in promotion and execution activities could be attributed to the direct involvement and sense of ownership that such activities provide.

On the other hand, lower participation in monitoring, providing feedback, and engaging with government officials indicates a gap in more strategic or oversight roles. This observation is consistent with the findings of Hassan (2023) in Wajir County, Kenya, where socio-economic factors and a lack of adequate training were identified as limiting youth participation in higher-level project activities. Similarly, Ochebo et al. (2019) and Etuk et al (2019) pointed out that limited access to decision-making processes often hinders the effectiveness of youth and women involvement in rural development projects in Nigeria. The low mean scores for monitoring and feedback activities may also reflect inadequate awareness or lack of capacity-building efforts targeted at engaging youth in these critical roles, as highlighted by Allotey et al. (2022), who emphasized the importance of involving both men and women in the monitoring of community projects to ensure sustainable outcomes. In comparison to findings from Adi et al. (2022) on the impact of CSDP in southern Taraba State, where youth participation was generally moderate across various activities, the data from Akwa Ibom indicates a more polarized pattern of participation. This contrast may point to regional differences in how CSDP is perceived and implemented, with factors such as local leadership and community dynamics potentially influencing the extent to which youth are involved in different aspects of the projects.

Table 4: Distribution of respondents based level of participation in CSDP (n=150)

Activities Involved	Low participation F (%)	Moderate participation F (%)	High participation F (%)	Mean	Rank
Attending CSDP meetings	30 (20.0)	55 (36.7)	65 (43.3)	2.23	3
Contributing ideas for CSDP project planning	40 (26.7)	60 (40.0)	50 (33.3)	2.07	6
Involvement in project execution	25 (16.7)	50 (33.3)	75 (50.0)	2.33	2
Participating in monitoring CSDP projects	60 (40.0)	45 (30.0)	45 (30.0)	1.90	8
Promoting CSDP activities in the community	20 (13.3)	50 (33.3)	80 (53.3)	2.40	1
Engaging with government officials for CSDP	45 (30.0)	55 (36.7)	50 (33.3)	2.03	7
Volunteering for CSDP-related activities	25 (16.7)	60 (40.0)	65 (43.3)	2.27	3
Organizing or leading CSDP initiatives	30 (20.0)	50 (33.3)	70 (46.7)	2.27	3
Participating in CSDP training programs	50 (33.3)	50 (33.3)	50 (33.3)	2.00	6
Providing feedback on CSDP project outcomes	60 (40.0)	40 (26.7)	50 (33.3)	1.93	9
Cluster Mean				2.14	

Critical Value = 2.0

Source: Field data (2024)

Conclusion

The study concluded that the levels of youth awareness and participation in Community and Social Development Projects (CSDP) was high in Akwa Ibom State. The results suggest that while youth are somewhat aware of CSDP initiatives, particularly in water supply, skill acquisition, and vulnerable group support, there remains a gap in awareness regarding other crucial areas such as rural electrification and road infrastructure projects. Furthermore, the study highlights that youth generally perceive CSDP positively, recognizing its potential to improve community development and youth empowerment, yet the perceived sustainability and government support for these initiatives are lower.

Youth participation in CSDP is essential for its success, but the level of involvement in project execution, promoting activities, and volunteering shows room for improvement. Key factors limiting participation include lack of information, economic and time constraints, and limited access to resources, which are exacerbated by cultural beliefs and lack of support from community leaders. Addressing these barriers is critical for enhancing youth involvement and maximizing the benefits of CSDP in the region.

Recommendations

1. To promote a sense of ownership and leadership among youth, their participation in decision-making processes regarding CSDP should be enhanced. This can be achieved by providing access to leadership roles and creating platforms where youth voices are heard and incorporated into the planning and execution phases of projects.
2. Programmes that provide financial support, stipends, or time-flexible opportunities should be introduced to mitigate the economic and time constraints that prevent youth from actively engaging in CSDP. These initiatives will make it easier for economically disadvantaged youth to participate fully in these projects.
3. Greater involvement of community leaders and local government bodies is needed to support youth participation. Policies that ensure adequate funding, resources, and mentorship programs should be implemented, and community leaders should be encouraged to play active roles in motivating and guiding youth in the successful execution of CSDP activities.

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