

Participation in Community Development Activities by Members of Youth Groups in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study assessed the level of youth group members' participation in community development activities in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Specifically, it described the socio-economic characteristics of youths, examined their attitude towards community development, evaluated the level of participation in these activities, identified the various community development projects executed, and analyzed the factors affecting youth participation in community development. A multistage sampling procedure was used to select 150 respondents, ensuring representation across the six Akwa Ibom State Agricultural Development Programme zones. Data was collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics and factor analysis. Findings revealed that 58% of respondents were male, 36% were aged 26-35, and 43% had tertiary education. Various youth groups were identified, with the majority of youths expressing a positive attitude towards community development, though participation levels varied across groups. Factors such as education, income, and leadership roles significantly influenced youth participation. The study concluded that while youth groups play a critical role in community development, their full potential is hindered by economic constraints and inadequate government support. It was recommended that the government and relevant agencies should increase financial and infrastructural support to enhance youth participation in community development initiatives.

Keywords: *Community development, participation, members of youth groups*

Introduction

Community development is essential for driving socio-economic progress, particularly in regions like Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. It encompasses collective actions aimed at improving the quality of life through infrastructure projects, health initiatives, education, and other welfare activities (Ekanem et al 2014, Muhammad, 2023 & Udoma, et al, 2023). Youth groups play a pivotal role in this process due to their energy, creativity, and leadership potential. Their active participation not only ensures the success of community-driven initiatives but also fosters sustainability, as they represent future leaders and workforce contributors (Brennan et al 2007). Youth involvement promotes inclusive growth, benefiting both present and future generations (Bappi et al 2018). However, various barriers continue to impede youth participation in community development. Socio-economic challenges such as unemployment, poverty, and limited access to resources,

coupled with inadequate government support, significantly reduce their engagement (Alabi et al 2023). In addition, poor training opportunities, leadership deficiencies, and political instability further exacerbate the situation (Etuk et al 2018). Despite the existence of numerous youth organizations, their overall involvement in community development remains below optimal levels (Effiong & Ekpenyong, 2017). This study seeks to assess the level of participation of youth groups in community development activities in Akwa Ibom State. By exploring their socio-economic characteristics, attitudes, and the factors influencing their engagement, the research aims to provide actionable insights for improving youth involvement and addressing barriers to participation.

Despite increasing recognition of the need for youth participation in community development, youth groups in Akwa Ibom State face persistent challenges that hinder their full engagement in these initiatives. Although programmes have been introduced to promote youth involvement, participation remains inadequate due to limited resources, insufficient training, and lack of government support (Etuk et al 2018). Socio-economic issues such as unemployment and poverty often compel youths to prioritize personal needs over community welfare, further restricting their involvement (Alabi et al 2023). While previous research has explored youth participation in agricultural programs (Etuk et al., 2018) and rural projects (Akpan et al 2015), there is little empirical evidence on how broader socio-cultural, economic, and structural barriers affect youth groups' participation in community development activities. Additionally, although many youth organizations exist in Akwa Ibom, political instability and infrastructural deficits continue to deter meaningful participation (Effiong & Ekpenyong, 2017; Ataide et al 2024).

This study addresses these research gaps by assessing the level of members of youth groups' participation in community development activities in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The specific objectives were to:

- i. describes the socio-economic characteristics of members of youth groups in the study area;
- ii. examine the attitude of members of youth groups toward community development in the study area;
- iii. examine the level of participation of members of youth groups in community development activities in the study area;
- iv. identify the various community development projects executed by members of youth groups in the study area;
- v. examine the factors affecting members of youth groups' participation in community development in the study area.

Review of Empirical Literatures

Numerous studies highlight the role of socio-economic factors like age, education, and income in influencing youth participation in community development. Etuk et al (2018) observed that youth engagement in agricultural programs was higher among those with tertiary education and moderate income. Sarkisian and Gerstel (2016) noted that single individuals are more active in community activities due to fewer family responsibilities. In Akwa Ibom, youth participation reflects socio-

economic diversity, particularly in age, marital status, and income. Youth groups are essential in mobilizing community resources for development. Effiong and Ekpenyong (2017) emphasized that the structure of these groups significantly affects the success of community initiatives, though leadership challenges and lack of collaboration often hinder progress. Akpan et al (2015) stressed the need for stronger institutional support to enhance group efficiency, which is crucial for addressing similar challenges in Akwa Ibom.

While youth attitudes toward community development are generally positive, engagement is influenced by factors such as motivation and perceived benefits. Adekalu, et al (2017) and Etuk et al (2018) found that youths recognize the importance of involvement but are often discouraged by limited personal gains or inadequate government support. This is evident in Akwa Ibom, where positive attitudes are undermined by insufficient incentives. Youth participation varies across activities. In Akwa Ibom, health campaigns, environmental sanitation, and educational programs see the highest involvement (Bugshan et al, 2022), while agricultural and security-related activities lag, reflecting socio-economic constraints similar to those observed by Akpan et al (2015). These gaps highlight the need for targeted interventions to boost engagement in underperforming sectors.

Youth-driven projects, such as road construction and water provision, generally succeed, aligning with Gautam's (2020) findings. However, agricultural and security initiatives face significant challenges. Mboho (2024) attributes this to funding shortages and logistical constraints, a situation also evident in Akwa Ibom, where many such projects remain incomplete or underfunded. Factors such as leadership quality, funding, and peer influence are critical to youth participation. Bappi et al (2018) identified these as key determinants, which is consistent with the situation in Akwa Ibom, where institutional constraints like weak leadership and insufficient government support hinder effective participation (Akpan et al., 2015). Addressing these barriers is vital to improving youth engagement in community development.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is anchored in the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), proposed by Icek Ajzen in 1991. TPB posits that individual behavior is driven by behavioral intentions, which are, in turn, influenced by three key factors: attitudes towards the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). The theory assumes that individuals' attitudes toward a behavior (e.g., participation in community development activities), the perceived social pressure to engage in or refrain from the behavior (subjective norms), and their confidence in their ability to perform the behavior (perceived behavioral control) collectively determine their intentions and subsequent actions.

TPB is relevant to this study as it offers a structured approach to understanding the factors influencing youth groups' participation in community development activities in Akwa Ibom State. Participation in such activities can be influenced by youths' attitudes (whether they view community development as beneficial or burdensome), the social norms within their communities or peer groups (such as expectations from other youth groups or community leaders), and their perceived control over participation (which may be affected by access to resources, time

constraints, or personal skills). For example, Hardin-Fanning and Ricks (2017) applied TPB to examine participation in a cooking skills program and found that perceived behavioral control significantly influenced participation rates. Similarly, the theory's core components have been successfully used in various contexts, such as food consumption behavior (Al-Swidi et al 2014) and condom use among college students (Asare, 2015).

In the context of this study, TPB provides a robust framework for examining the socio-economic characteristics, attitudes, and external factors that influence youth participation in community development projects. The theory suggests that youths who hold positive attitudes toward these activities, experience supportive social norms, and feel capable of contributing meaningfully are more likely to participate actively. This theoretical perspective is critical in analyzing the factors that may enhance or hinder youth participation and informs the identification of strategies to improve engagement in community development efforts in the study area.

Methodology

The study was conducted in Akwa Ibom State, located in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Akwa Ibom is a coastal state known for its agricultural activities, with farming and fishing being the primary occupations of many residents. The state is administratively divided into 31 Local Government Areas (LGAs) and has six Akwa Ibom State Agricultural Development Programme (AKADEP) zones: Uyo, Ikot Ekpene, Abak, Etinan, Eket, and Oron (Etuk & Umoh, 2014). Each zone encompasses various youth groups involved in community development activities. The study area is relevant as it represents a mix of urban and rural communities, each with different youth group dynamics (Effiong & Ekpenyong, 2017). The study population comprised all members of youth groups fully registered with the Ministry of Youth and Sports in Akwa Ibom State as of 2024.

A multistage sampling procedure was employed to select 150 respondents for the study, with the aim of ensuring comprehensive representation of youth groups across the six AKADEP zones while capturing the diversity in group membership and activities. In the first stage, youth groups were stratified based on their geographical location within the six zones: Uyo, Ikot Ekpene, Abak, Etinan, Eket, and Oron. This stratification allowed for adequate representation of each zone, considering the cultural, economic, and social variations among them. In the second stage, 10% of the functional youth groups in each zone were randomly selected. This sampling fraction was chosen to ensure a manageable yet representative sample size, given the total number of registered youth groups in the state. The 10% proportion provided a diverse and appropriately sized sample from each zone. In the third stage, individual respondents were randomly selected from within the chosen youth groups. A sampling fraction of 10% of each group's membership strength was used to ensure proportional representation, thereby avoiding the over-representation or under-representation of groups based on their size. Overall, 150 respondents were selected, ensuring balanced representation across the six zones. The sampling frame is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Sampling Frame for the Study

S/N	Zones and Youth Groups	Membership Strength (AKSG Ministry of Youth and Sports, 2024)	Numbers Sampled (10% of Membership Strength)
A	Uyo Zone		
1	Nka Unwam Ndikpo Atang (Ibesikpo)	80	8
2	Ikot Akpan Oku Youth Association (Uyo)	101	10
3	Oku Iboku Youth Forum (Itu)	82	8
4	Ifiyong Esuk Youth Association (Uruan)	89	9
	Sub Total		35
B	Ikot Ekpene Zone		
5	Ukana Ikot Nkwa Youth Organization (Essien Udim)	80	8
6	Nto Ekpe Youth Development Association (Obot Akara)	79	8
7	Nka Uforo Ndito Isong (Ini)	60	6
	Sub Total		22
C	Abak Zone		
8	Ata Uko Nto Otoro (Abak)	60	6
9	Nto Inyang Development Association (Ika)	96	10
10	Ikot Uso Etuk Youth Development Association (Oruk Anam)	86	9
	Sub Total		25
D	Etinan Zone		
11	Ikot Ebiyak Youth Development Association (Etinan)	70	7
12	Itreto Youth Development Forum (Nsit Ubium)	86	9
13	Ibia Ikot Youth Forum (Nsit Atai)	91	9
	Sub Total		25
E	Eket Zone		
14	Iko Central Youth Council (Eastern Obolo)	74	7
15	Esup Ndito Ekpuk (Eket)	60	6
16	Akwa Esop Akpanang (Onna)	82	8
	Sub Total		21
F	Oron Zone		
17	Unyenge Community Youth Association (Mbo)	121	12
18	Oro Peace Initiative (Oron)	119	10
	Sub Total		22
	Total		150

Source: Akwa Ibom State Ministry of Youth and Sports (Registered Youth Groups, 2024)

Primary data for this study were collected using a set of structured questionnaires. The questionnaire was designed to cover all the specific objectives of the study. The specific objectives measured. A four-point Likert-type scale of strongly agree (4), agree (3), disagree (2), and

strongly disagree (1) was used to examine the attitude of members of youth groups toward community development with the cut-off mean was 2.5. In examining the level of participation of members of youth groups in community development activities, it was measured using a 3-point scale of rarely involved (1), occasionally involved (2) and actively involved (3) was used with the cut-off mean was 2. In assessing the various community development projects executed by members of youth groups in the study area; a 3-point scale of completed (3), ongoing (2) and planned (1) was used. Examining the factors affecting members of youth groups' participation in community development in the study area, 4 -point Likert-type scale of strongly agree (4), agree (3), disagree (2), and strongly disagree (1) was used with the cut-off mean was 2.5. Descriptive statistics (frequency counts, percentages, and mean scores) were used to analyze socio-economic characteristics, attitudes, and participation levels. Factor analysis to identify the factors affecting youth participation in community development activities.

Results and Discussions

Socio-Economic Characteristics of Youths

The results from Table 2 reveal the socio-economic characteristics of youths in the study area. In terms of sex, the highest proportion of respondents were male (58.0%), while females made up 42.0%. Regarding age, the majority of respondents (36.0%) were between 26-35 years old, with the lowest percentage (8.0%) being those aged above 45. For marital status, 60.7% of respondents were single, while widowed individuals had the lowest representation of 4.0%. In terms of education, the highest percentage of respondents had tertiary education (43.3%), while those with no formal education were the least represented at 4.0%. In occupation of the members of group youth, the majority of the respondents were students (32.0%), while artisans had the lowest representation (6.0%). Income levels revealed that most of respondents (32.0%) earned between ₦20,000 - ₦50,000 monthly, while 20.0% earned ₦100,001 and above. Household size showed that 54.0% of respondents had 3-5 members, while only 8.0% had more than 8 members. In terms of religion, the vast majority of respondents identified as Christian (92.0%), with Islam and Traditional religions both represented by 4.0%. As for the length of residence, more than half of the respondents (52.0%) had lived in the area for over 15 years, while only 8.0% had lived there for less than 5 years. Lastly, in terms of position in youth groups, 58.0% were members, while 24.0% had no position.

The findings on sex distribution align with other studies indicating a higher male representation in community development activities, which might be attributed to cultural expectations or socio-economic factors. For example, Bappi *et al.*, (2018) suggested that male participation in community development is often driven by their perceived societal roles as providers, while females may be more involved in domestic activities, potentially limiting their engagement. Similarly, the age distribution, with a concentration in the 26-35 years range, highlights the active involvement of young adults, as they are typically more physically capable and motivated to contribute to community development, a pattern also noted by Etuk *et al.*, (2018). The high percentage of single respondents (60.7%) could suggest that single individuals have fewer family responsibilities, allowing them more time and flexibility for community engagement. This aligns

with findings by Sarkisian and Gerstel (2016), who noted that single individuals tend to have stronger community ties due to fewer obligations at home. In terms of educational attainment, the high percentage of respondents with tertiary education (43.3%) may reflect the increased awareness and value placed on education in fostering leadership and active participation in community development, as noted by Derweanna et al (2017). Higher education levels are often linked to better organizational skills, access to information, and a broader understanding of community needs, facilitating more effective participation.

The income distribution indicates that most youths earn between ₦20,000 - ₦50,000, suggesting moderate financial stability among participants. As Choudhury et al (2023) highlighted, income levels can significantly influence the ability to contribute to and benefit from community development projects, as those with higher incomes may have more resources to invest in such activities. However, the presence of lower-income earners shows that community participation may not be exclusively driven by financial capacity but also by a sense of social responsibility, as noted by Udoma et al (2024). The large proportion of respondents with long-term residence in the area (52.0% having lived for over 15 years) implies a strong sense of community attachment, which has been found to foster higher levels of participation in local development activities, as suggested by Toruńczyk-Ruiz and Martinović (2020). Long-term residents may feel a deeper connection to the community's progress and are more likely to contribute to its development.

Table 2: Socio-economic characteristics of youths (n = 150)

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex		
Male	87	58.0
Female	63	42.0
Age		
Under 18	15	10.0
18-25	48	32.0
26-35	54	36.0
36-45	21	14.0
Above 45	12	8.0
Marital Status:		
Single	91	60.7
Married	49	32.7
Divorced	4	2.7
Widowed	6	4.0
Level of Education		
No formal education	6	4.0
Primary	15	10.0
Secondary	64	42.7
Tertiary	65	43.3
Occupation		
Student	48	32.0

Farmer	21	14.0
Trader	33	22.0
Civil Servant	27	18.0
Artisan	9	6.0
Unemployed	12	8.0
Income (Monthly)		
Below ₦20,000	27	18.0
₦20,000 - ₦50,000	48	32.0
₦50,001 - ₦100,000	45	30.0
₦100,001 and above	30	20.0
Household Size		
1-2 members	30	20.0
3-5 members	81	54.0
6-8 members	27	18.0
Above 8 members	12	8.0
Religion		
Christianity	138	92.0
Islam	6	4.0
Traditional	6	4.0
Years of Residence		
Less than 5 years	12	8.0
5-10 years	27	18.0
11-15 years	33	22.0
Over 15 years	78	52.0
Position in Youth Group		
Leader	27	18.0
Member	87	58.0
No position	36	24.0

Source: Field data (2024)

Attitude of Youths Toward Community Development in the Study Area

The findings in Table 3 highlight the attitudes of youths toward community development in the study area. The three statements with the highest mean scores indicate a strong inclination toward recognizing the importance of youth participation in community development. Specifically, the statement "Youth participation is crucial for progress in community development" had the highest mean score of 3.13, followed by "Youth groups are essential for the development of our community" with a mean score of 3.11, and "Youths should be actively involved in community development" with a mean score of 3.07. These high scores reflect a positive attitude, as most respondents agreed or strongly agreed that youth participation is vital for community progress and development. On the other hand, the three lowest mean scores suggest areas where youths may perceive less personal benefit or a lesser sense of responsibility in community development. The statement "I believe community development is the responsibility of the government" had the

lowest mean score of 2.20, indicating a significant proportion of respondents disagreed with this notion. "Participating in community development does not bring personal benefits" followed with a mean score of 2.43, and "I feel motivated to participate in community development activities" scored 2.83, showing that while there is some motivation, it may not be as strong as the broader recognition of youth participation's value.

The overall cluster means of 2.86, which is above the critical value of 2.5, suggests that youths generally hold a positive attitude toward community development in Akwa Ibom State. This result aligns with the findings of Adekalu et al (2017), who observed that motivation factors play a critical role in community engagement practices, emphasizing that individuals, including youths, are driven by both internal and external incentives when participating in communal efforts. Similarly, the findings support Etuk *et al.*, (2018), who analyzed youth participation in community development activities in Akwa Ibom State and found that most youths recognized their role and were willing to participate in such activities.

However, the lower mean scores in areas related to personal benefits and motivation indicate that while youths understand the importance of participation, their involvement may be hindered by the perceived lack of personal gains from community development efforts. This correlates with findings by Bappi *et al.*, (2018), who reported that one of the challenges in community development in Nigeria is that participants often feel unrewarded or unrecognized, which can reduce their motivation to engage actively. Similarly, the study by Ezeh et al (2018) highlighted that in some cases, the perception that community development is primarily the government's responsibility can weaken youth participation.

Table 3: Distribution of respondents based on attitude of youths toward community development (n = 150)

Statements	Strongly Disagree F(%)	Disagree F(%)	Agree F(%)	Strongly Agree F(%)	Mean
Youths should be actively involved in community development.	10 (6.7%)	20 (13.3%)	70 (46.7%)	50 (33.3%)	3.07
I believe community development is the responsibility of the government.	45 (30.0%)	50 (33.3%)	35 (23.3%)	20 (13.3%)	2.20
I am proud to participate in community development activities.	15 (10.0%)	25 (16.7%)	70 (46.7%)	40 (26.7%)	2.90
Youth groups are essential for the development of our community.	8 (5.3%)	12 (8.0%)	85 (56.7%)	45 (30.0%)	3.11
I am willing to devote my time to community development projects.	18 (12.0%)	22 (14.7%)	65 (43.3%)	45 (30.0%)	2.91

Community development efforts benefit the entire community.	12 (8.0%)	18 (12.0%)	80 (53.3%)	40 (26.7%)	2.99
Participating in community development does not bring personal benefits.	35 (23.3%)	40 (26.7%)	50 (33.3%)	25 (16.7%)	2.43
I feel motivated to participate in community development activities.	20 (13.3%)	25 (16.7%)	65 (43.3%)	40 (26.7%)	2.83
Youth participation is crucial for progress in community development.	5 (3.3%)	15 (10.0%)	85 (56.7%)	45 (30.0%)	3.13
I would encourage others to join community development activities.	10 (6.7%)	18 (12.0%)	80 (53.3%)	42 (28.0%)	3.03

Cluster Mean: 2.86; Critical Value = 2.5

Source: Field data (2024)

Level of Participation of Youth Groups in Community Development Activities in the Study Area

The findings in Table 4 reveal that youth groups in Akwa Ibom State actively participate in various community development activities at different levels. Health campaigns recorded the highest level of active involvement with a mean score of 3.07, followed by environmental sanitation with a mean score of 3.00, and educational programs with a mean score of 2.80. These activities appear to resonate strongly with the youth, likely due to their direct impact on community well-being and personal development. In contrast, the lowest levels of participation were observed in vocational training programmes (mean = 2.20), security patrols (mean = 2.33), and cultural festivals (mean = 2.43). The overall cluster means of 2.72, which is above the critical value of 2.5, indicates a general moderate to high level of youth participation in community development activities. The high involvement in health campaigns aligns with the findings of Bugshan *et al* (2022), who emphasize the role of health awareness campaigns in improving public health, suggesting that youths in Akwa Ibom recognize the importance of such initiatives in their communities. Similarly, the substantial involvement in environmental sanitation and educational programs may reflect the youths' understanding of their responsibility toward enhancing public hygiene and education, which supports the observations of Bappi *et al.*, (2018), who highlighted community participation as a vital element in the development of sustainable local initiatives.

Conversely, vocational training programmes had one of the lowest participation levels, with a mean score of 2.20. This suggests that despite the potential benefits of such programs in equipping youths with marketable skills, engagement remains low. This could be attributed to inadequate resources or the perception that these programs do not offer immediate economic rewards, as suggested by Akpan *et al.* (2015), who noted that many youths in Southern Nigeria show limited

interest in skill development activities due to socio-economic constraints. Participation in security patrols also ranked low, which may be attributed to the inherent risks associated with security roles, as well as a lack of adequate training and motivation, as noted in the study by Etuk *et al.*, (2018). This low involvement in security roles might also reflect a broader issue of youth disengagement from governance and civic duties, as highlighted by Kabit (2019), who identified similar trends in rural community development efforts.

The findings concerning cultural festivals being among the least participated activities can be linked to evolving youth preferences, where modern, globalized forms of entertainment may overshadow traditional events. Rutagand (2024) suggests that although cultural festivals play a crucial role in promoting social cohesion, their appeal to younger demographics is waning, possibly explaining the low involvement in this area.

Table 4: Distribution of respondents based on level of participation of members of youth groups in community development activities (n = 150)

Community Development Activity	Not Involved	Rarely Involved	Occasionally Involved	Actively Involved	Mean
Road construction/maintenance	30 (20.0%)	40 (26.7%)	45 (30.0%)	35 (23.3%)	2.57
Health campaigns	15 (10.0%)	20 (13.3%)	55 (36.7%)	60 (40.0%)	3.07
Environmental sanitation	10 (6.7%)	30 (20.0%)	60 (40.0%)	50 (33.3%)	3.00
Educational programmes	20 (13.3%)	35 (23.3%)	50 (33.3%)	45 (30.0%)	2.80
Youth empowerment programmes	25 (16.7%)	30 (20.0%)	55 (36.7%)	40 (26.7%)	2.73
Fundraising for community projects	35 (23.3%)	40 (26.7%)	40 (26.7%)	35 (23.3%)	2.50
Security patrols	40 (26.7%)	45 (30.0%)	40 (26.7%)	25 (16.7%)	2.33
Vocational training programmes	50 (33.3%)	45 (30.0%)	30 (20.0%)	25 (16.7%)	2.20
Skill acquisition workshops	30 (20.0%)	40 (26.7%)	45 (30.0%)	35 (23.3%)	2.57
Cultural festivals	35 (23.3%)	45 (30.0%)	40 (26.7%)	30 (20.0%)	2.43

Cluster Mean: 2.72; Critical Value = 2.5

Source: Field data (2024)

The Various Community Development Projects Executed in the Study Area

The findings presented in Table 5 highlight the various community development projects executed in the study area. Based on the results, the top three projects with the highest mean scores are Construction of roads and bridges (mean = 3.13), Provision of portable water (mean = 3.03), and Youth and women empowerment programs (mean = 3.03). These results suggest a significant focus on infrastructure and social empowerment initiatives within the community. The construction of roads and bridges, with the highest mean score, reflects the importance placed on improving transportation and accessibility, a critical factor in community development. This

finding aligns with the work of Gautam (2020), who emphasized the role of bridge construction in improving rural livelihoods by facilitating movement and access to services. The provision of portable water, ranking second, is vital for health and sanitation, consistent with Kanjin et al (2023), who underscored the impact of water access on livelihoods in rural communities. Similarly, the emphasis on youth and women empowerment mirrors the findings of Ayeni (2021), who stressed the role of empowerment programs in addressing unemployment and fostering social inclusion among marginalized groups.

In contrast, the projects with the lowest mean scores are Agricultural development projects (mean = 2.67), Security and safety patrols (mean = 2.63), and Housing projects for low-income families (mean = 2.73). The relatively lower engagement in agricultural projects, despite the agrarian nature of many rural communities, is concerning. This observation may suggest a gap in the prioritization of agriculture, which is critical for rural livelihoods, as supported by Akpan *et al.*, (2015), who identified agriculture as a key area for youth participation in southern Nigeria. Similarly, the low mean score for security and safety patrols may reflect inadequate investment in security measures, an essential aspect of community well-being. This is inconsistent with the findings of Bappi *et al.*, (2018), who emphasized the importance of security in fostering community participation in development projects. The housing projects for low-income families also show a lower level of completion, indicating potential challenges in addressing housing needs, a key issue in rural poverty alleviation, as noted by Mboho (2024).

Table 5: Distribution of respondents based on the various community development projects executed (n = 150)

Community Development Project	Completed	Ongoing	Planned	Mean
Construction of roads and bridges	60 (40.0%)	50 (33.3%)	40 (26.7%)	3.13
Provision of portable water (boreholes, wells, etc.)	55 (36.7%)	45 (30.0%)	50 (33.3%)	3.03
Building of health centers and clinics	40 (26.7%)	55 (36.7%)	55 (36.7%)	2.90
Educational infrastructure (schools, libraries)	45 (30.0%)	50 (33.3%)	55 (36.7%)	2.93
Electrification projects	35 (23.3%)	50 (33.3%)	65 (43.3%)	2.80
Waste management and environmental sanitation	30 (20.0%)	60 (40.0%)	60 (40.0%)	2.80
Agricultural development projects (e.g., cooperative farms)	25 (16.7%)	50 (33.3%)	75 (50.0%)	2.67
Youth and women empowerment programs	50 (33.3%)	55 (36.7%)	45 (30.0%)	3.03
Housing projects for low-income families	25 (16.7%)	60 (40.0%)	65 (43.3%)	2.73
Security and safety patrols	20 (13.3%)	55 (36.7%)	75 (50.0%)	2.63

Cluster Mean: 2.89; Critical Value = 2.5

Source: Field data (2024)

Factors Affecting Youth Participation in Community Development in the Study Area

The results of the factor analysis revealed seven key factors affecting youth participation in community development activities in Akwa Ibom State, as shown in Table 6 and Table 7. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value of 0.812, as presented in Table 6, indicates that the sample size is adequate for factor analysis, confirming that the dataset is suitable for exploring underlying patterns. Furthermore, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is highly significant ($p < 0.05$), implying that there are sufficient correlations between the variables to justify factor analysis.

The factor analysis using principal component extraction with varimax rotation produced seven factors that explain 91.65% of the total variance, as outlined in Table 8. The first factor, labeled “Institutional and Structural Constraints”, includes variables such as lack of time (loading of 0.728), lack of funding (0.685), poor leadership in youth groups (0.671), corruption in leadership (0.691), and lack of proper supervision and monitoring (0.673). These findings align with the study by Akpan *et al.*, (2015), who highlighted the significant role of structural barriers such as poor leadership and inadequate funding in limiting youth engagement in rural agricultural production, suggesting a broader issue of institutional inefficiency across various sectors in Nigeria. The second factor, “Youth Motivation and Interest”, is characterized by variables like lack of interest among youth (0.752) and government support (0.711). This result mirrors the findings of Bappi *et al.*, (2018), who observed that youth motivation and government intervention are critical in determining the level of engagement in community development initiatives. The strong influence of interest and government support reflects the importance of intrinsic motivation and external facilitation, a notion also supported by Adeyemi *et al.* (2023) in their review of rural agricultural development programmes.

The third factor, “Peer and Educational Influences”, includes availability of training (0.689) and influence of peer groups (0.663), emphasizing the role of education and social influence in driving youth participation. This is consistent with findings by Chisomo and Ramasamy (2023), who identified peer group influence and access to training as significant motivators in youth participation in community projects in Malawi. The results suggest that equipping youth with relevant skills and fostering a positive peer environment may enhance their involvement in community development efforts. The fourth factor, “Recognition and Employment Opportunities”, comprises community recognition (0.702) and employment opportunities (0.681). The importance of recognition and employment opportunities supports the findings by Ayeni (2021), who pointed out that job creation and social recognition serve as powerful incentives for youth involvement in developmental initiatives.

The fifth factor, “Socio-Cultural and Family Responsibilities”, involves socio-cultural factors (0.734), lack of motivation (0.701), and family responsibilities (0.668). These variables highlight the dual burden faced by many youth participants, where cultural expectations and family obligations often interfere with their ability to fully engage in community development activities. Similar findings were reported by Edet and Attai (2014), who argued that socio-cultural norms and family duties are key determinants of youth participation in Akwa Ibom State. The sixth factor,

“Educational and Collaborative Limitations”, includes variables such as low levels of education among youth (0.682) and lack of collaboration among youth groups (0.681). This suggests that limited education and insufficient collaboration among youth groups pose barriers to participation. These findings are corroborated by Ezeh *et al.*, (2018), who identified education and group collaboration as essential components for successful community development projects in Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

The seventh and final factor, “Political and Geographical Challenges”, is associated with political instability (0.705), accessibility to community development projects (0.693), lack of awareness about community development opportunities (0.689), and distance from project sites (0.723). The impact of political and geographical factors aligns with the study by Ataide et al (2024), who noted that political instability and geographic inaccessibility were significant barriers to effective public service delivery in rural communities in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 6: KMO and Bartlett’s Test of Factors Affecting Youth Participation in Community Development

Test	Value
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure	0.812
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square = 532.24 df = 190 Sig. = 0.000

Table 7: Component Correlation Matrix of Factors Affecting Youth Participation in Community Development

Factors Affecting Youth Participation	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6	Factor 7	Comm.
Lack of time	0.728							0.721
Lack of funding	0.685							0.695
Poor leadership in youth groups	0.671							0.670
Lack of interest among youth		0.752						0.731
Government support		0.711						0.703
Availability of training			0.689					0.691
Influence of peer groups			0.663					0.679
Community recognition				0.702				0.711
Employment opportunities				0.681				0.694
Socio-cultural factors						0.734		0.724

Lack of motivation	0.701						0.713
Low level of education among youth					0.682		0.672
Family responsibilities					0.668		0.661
Political instability						0.705	0.699
Accessibility to community development projects						0.693	0.683
Lack of awareness about community development opportunities						0.689	0.679
Corruption in leadership	0.691						0.695
Lack of collaboration among youth groups					0.681		0.671
Distance from project sites					0.723		0.717
Lack of proper supervision and monitoring	0.673						0.683

Eigen Value	4.21	3.71	2.93	2.52	1.94	1.73	1.29
Percentage (%) of Variation	21.05%	18.55%	14.65%	12.60%	9.70%	8.65%	6.45%
Cumulative Percentage	21.05%	39.60%	54.25%	66.85%	76.55%	85.20%	91.65%

Conclusion and Recommendations

Participation level of members of youth groups in community development was moderate. lack of funding, poor leadership in youth groups, corruption in leadership and lack of proper supervision and monitoring were the major factors affecting participation in community development activities among members of youth groups. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made to enhance youth participation in community development activities:

1. **Strengthen Youth Leadership Structures:** Poor leadership within youth groups emerged as a significant barrier, with respondents citing a lack of direction and coordination. To address this, leadership development programmes should be implemented to enhance the capacity of youth leaders, enabling them to effectively manage group activities and inspire greater participation.

2. Increase Funding and Resource Allocation: Lack of funding was identified as a major constraint limiting youth engagement in community projects. Government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should allocate more financial resources and provide grants or low-interest loans to youth groups. This support will encourage more active participation in development initiatives, particularly in areas like skill acquisition workshops and educational programmes.
3. Foster Collaboration Between Youth Groups and Local Leaders: A lack of collaboration between youth groups and community leaders was noted as a limiting factor. Strengthening the relationship between these groups and local governments can enhance the planning and execution of development projects. Establishing formal channels for communication and cooperation will allow for better coordination and more impactful outcomes.

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