COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN IMO STATE

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Abstract
The rural Nigeria has the largest number of citizens with not less than 75% of the country’s total population living in the rural areas. It is the collective desire of this vast majority of the Nigerian population to access development irrespective of political, economic and social status. Community participation has been identified as an effective driver of rural development in emerging economies. The study aims at assessing the level of community participation in the provision of public infrastructure in Ahiazu Mbaise Local Government Area of Imo State. In achieving this, multi-stage sampling technique was used to interview 150 respondents using structured questionnaire and interview. Analysis of the data utilized simple descriptive statistics while the results were presented as tables, figures and charts. The study found out among other things; that community participation helps in the sustainability of developmental projects; there is a dearth of information and lack of synergy between government agencies charged with the responsibility of planning and implementation of rural development programmes and the beneficiaries of such development. The study recommended that there should be an increased level of awareness and enlightenment about community participation through mass media, and regular meetings with traditional authorities. Also, involvement of rural people in project formulation, planning and implementation should be encouraged. Moreover, government should create enabling environment where the people at the grass-root will participate actively in decision-making process that affect their condition of living and by so doing, it could stimulate the relationship between government and rural people as partners in progress.
Keywords: Community, Participation, Rural Development, Sustainability, Rural Infrastructure.

Introduction
Rural development from a general point of view is the process of improving the quality of life and economic wellbeing of people living in relatively isolated and sparsely populated areas (Moseley, 2003) which are also known as rural areas. However, despite strategies put in place in form of projects provided for rural people, many do not benefit because of their non-involvement in the project planning process and implementation hence, the emphasis on community participation in rural development projects.

Rural development is more pragmatic when people participate in the process of infrastructural provision because at the heart of rural development lies the provision of infrastructures such as (motorable roads, schools, markets, electricity, water supply) and for the overall goals and objectives to be met, the principle for effective community participation must be adapted (Idachaba & Bankole, 2006).

Community participation as a development approach for rural socioeconomic development is an alternative to the top–down approach which has failed to yield the desired result because rural dwellers who are target beneficiaries were not carried along initially (Bankole, 2007). The term has been conceptualized in different ways in the literature as public, people or citizen participation; however they all have the same focus, which is rural development (Afolayan, 2008). Participation is all about inclusiveness, social justice and common good which shows that rural development is community based when people in communities determine their needs and aspirations.

Since the independence of Nigeria in 1960, rural or community development has been declared a priority by successive governments, be it civilian or military. In this regard, several organizations, institutions and agencies have been set up to undertake and monitor the complicated process of nation-building, development and integration. This post colonial orientation is a digression from the erstwhile colonial arrangement whereby development efforts in all spheres were concentrated in the urban areas to the neglect of rural areas. Hence, projects such as the construction of roads, bridges, railway lines, airstrips, ports, schools hospitals, and marketing boards, among others, were all aimed at opening the rural areas as a link for the easy exploitation of export raw materials.

In Nigeria, recent estimate by the World Bank indicates that over 50 percent of the country’s population live below the poverty line while about two third of this group are extremely poor (UNDP, 2018). Adesope and Agumagu (2000) observed that the spate of poverty and youth unemployment is particularly serious in rural areas of Nigeria, perhaps because of the low level of rural development leading to illiteracy and inaccessibility to minimum basic facilities and services. Improving rural development projects is one of the greatest challenges facing many rural dwellers at present.

Although, Ahiazu Mbaise local government council have already executed and still have some on-going projects as strategies for rural development, the pattern and level of
community participation in such projects are insignificant. Nhlakanipho (2010) also opined that the rural poor have not really participated in sharing the benefits from the enormous development efforts of the last three decades in proportion to their needs. Unless the rural communities are given opportunities to participate in rural development interventions designed to improve their conditions of living, the level of spatial inequalities among regions will tend to increase. It therefore becomes imperative to analyze the processes involved in the provision of infrastructures in Ahiazu Mbaise local government area.

Statement of the Problem
It has been acknowledged that for any meaningful rural development to take place, the main focus should be on the voluntary efforts of the people to participate effectively in developmental projects in their areas. To achieve this, both government and the people must be well informed of some factors relating to processes, the intricacies, patterns involved in rural development programmes. The presence of rural development projects is not strongly felt in most rural communities, Ahiazu Mbaise local government area inclusive. This has resulted in the inaccessibility of most rural dwellers to some facilities and services. Also, most basic facilities are urban concentrated and rural dwellers denied (Oyebanji, 2000). More worrisome is that poverty has made majority of rural dwellers not to have means to access long distance services in the outskirt of the rural communities because most projects are sited in majorly urban centres. Rural development projects have been embarked upon by many communities based on self –help informed by the realization that no government can meet all the needs of all the rural communities (Adedayo, 2000). Nonetheless, the government should make provision of these projects because the fact remains that there can be no meaningful rural development without the effective harnessing of the potentialities of the rural communities. However, in spite the clamour for ‘bottom-up’ approach to rural development, project beneficiaries are still being deprived of participating in the identification, planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of projects that are meant to improve their welfare.

Objectives of the Study
The overall aim of this study is to assess community participation in rural development projects in Ahiazu Mbaise LGA, Imo State. To achieve this aim, the specific objectives of this study include to:

i. Identify rural development projects in the study area.
ii. Assess the level of participation of rural people in infrastructural development.
iii. Examine how infrastructural facilities are being sustained/maintained in the study area.
iv. Examine the constraints to community participation in rural development projects in the study area.

Significance of the Study
Community participation is indispensible for rural development projects in Nigeria and the developing countries in general because the idea is to improve quality of life of the rural populace.
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The findings of the study will assist Ahiazu Mbaise local government council, traditional authorities, community leaders, non-governmental agencies and other development agencies such as community workers to consider different approaches of involving rural dwellers in rural development projects.

The findings of this study will serve as a frame of reference for the development programmes which are taking place in rural areas, be helpful to government, policy makers, development agencies in identifying the necessity of community participation in their project cycle, help in the modification and re-strategizing on how participation approach could be used in problem solving efforts towards improvement of the quality of rural life.

The study will form a database for future studies and serve as important reference material for planners, multilateral organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and others interested in rural development.

Literature Review

Conceptual Clarifications

Community participation has been a widespread terminology in development and management all over the world as evidence from the policy guidelines of many countries (Kombo & Kimani, 2011). This has been geared towards tapping the potentials of the people in improving their living standards. It has been perceived to be a positive move particularly in the developing countries where the majority of the population still live in undeveloped rural areas (Toyobo & Muili 2013). Thus, community participation has been an important component of community development and reflected a grassroots or bottom-up approach to problem-solving. Community participation according to Ertsen (2007) is the active engagement of individuals within a community to solve problems, influence policies and programmes designed towards improving the quality of their lives. Community participation means active involvement of all citizens (men, women, youths and children) in the community, irrespective of age, nature of citizenship, socio-economic status, political affiliation, religion, level of education and others in planning and implementing programmes and projects that are of benefit to the people (Onyenemezu, 2014). Anyanwu (1992) as cited in (Abiona and Bello, 2013) refers to community participation as an active process whereby beneficiaries influence the direction and execution of development projects rather than merely receiving a share of the project benefits. Thus, it can be said that community participation entails the involvement of the people or their representatives in the formulation and development of proposals, planning of programmes and its implementation. It emphasizes total control by the community members and lesser degree of government imposition of projects on the people (community), by allowing the community to do the work among them without external assistance.

Rural Development

Development generally connotes change, progression, advancement, improvement and rural development is a concept of this broader term. Hunter (1964) was among the earliest authors to use the term rural development. He considered this as the starting point of development. Rural development focuses on reducing inequality and improvement of the quality of life of the rural people. Obinne in Ogidefa (2010) perceives rural development to involve creating...
and widening opportunities for rural dwellers to realize their full potentials through sharing in decisions and actions which affect their lives while Kakumba and Nsingo (2008) state that rural development is used to refer to schemes aimed at improving the countryside or peripheral areas, with a characteristic agrarian population. Rural development encompasses all aspects of human life in the rural area and deals with range of activities involving the mobilization of resources in order to empower the people to break away from all structural disabilities that prevent them from enjoying better living conditions.

Theoretical Framework
This study is anchored on Maslow’s Need Hierarchy Theory. According to Maslow 1943, the need for self-actualization is a healthy person’s prime motivation. Self-actualization means actualizing one’s potential, becoming everything one is capable of becoming. On the whole, an individual cannot satisfy any level unless needs below are satisfied. The hierarchy of needs focus on five categories of needs arranged in ascending order of importance, physiological, safety, belongingness and love are the lower-level needs in the hierarchy. The higher-level needs are esteem and self actualization. When one need is satisfied, another higher-level need emerges and motivates the person to do something to satisfy it. A satisfied need is no longer a motivator. The five major needs are as follow, starting from the lowest-order needs:

**Basic physiological needs:** This theory postulates that individuals are primarily concerned with satisfying needs such as food, water, air and shelter.

**Safety needs:** According to Robbins and Decenzo (2003), once the physiological needs have been satisfied, the need for safety becomes evident. These needs refer to freedom from physical, economic and emotional harm.

**Social Needs:** Once the physiological and safety needs have been satisfied, the need for love, affection and belongingness emerge.

**Esteem needs:** According to Maslow, esteem needs can be divided into two types, namely mastery and achievement (self) and recognition and approval (others).

**Self-actualization needs:** Self-actualization is the fifth and final level of the hierarchy, which includes the need for growth, achieving one’s potential and self-fulfilment.

![Maslow’s Hierarchy of Human Needs](image)

Fig.1: Maslow’s Hierarchy of Human Needs
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Source: Ukah, (2019)

This theory is related to this study because Maslow postulated that needs identification and satisfaction are vital tools that motivate individuals to participate in rural development projects. In the sense that if projects cited in the communities are in line with citizens felt needs and aspirations, they will be motivated to participate in the execution of such projects in their communities. In other words, the provision of basic needs of members of the community will help in the active participation in planning and implementation of rural development activities.

Methodology
The study was carried out in Ahiazu Mbaise one of the 27 Local Government Areas of Imo State, Nigeria. It was originally known as Mbaise County-Council Area until 1976 when Ahiara and Ekwerazu were merged to form Ahiazu-Mbaise Local Government Area. Its headquarter is in the town of Afor Oru. There are fourteen (14) communities that make up Ahiazu Mbaise. They are: Mpam, Ihitte Afor, Opara-Nadim, Akabor, Ogwuama/Amuzi, Obodo-Ujichi, Otulu/Aguneze, Umuokirika, Obohia, Ekwereazu, Obodoahiara, Lude/Nnarambia, Ogbe, Oru Ahiara. The local government area is bounded to the north by Isiala Mbano and Ehime Mbano, to the east by Obowo and Ihitte Uboma, to the south by Ezinihitte Mbaise and Abob Mbaise and to the west by Ikeduru.

The study adopted a descriptive and exploratory approach. The household constitutes the unit of observation for the study, as each household head or any adult member of the household was selected as respondent. This work employed both primary and secondary data sources. The primary data were derived through the use of questionnaire administration from the 150 sampled population in the study area. The secondary data were sourced from relevant literature information and other documents.

The multi-stage sampling method was employed in selecting 10 communities out of the 14 communities in Ahiazu Mbaise LGA, 15 respondents were randomly selected from each community making a total of 150 respondents. The information gotten from the sampled population were analyzed using frequency distribution table, simple percentage and charts.

Data Analysis and Discussion of Findings
Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Fig. 2 shows the result of gender data collected from respondents. It shows that a total of 87 (58%) of the respondents are male, while a total of 63 (42%) of the respondents are female. In other words, a greater percentage of the respondents in the study area are male. This could be due to the fact that men are more involved in developmental projects in rural areas.
Fig 2: Gender of Respondents

Education Level of Respondents

The educational status of the respondents as shown in Fig 3 shows that 22.7% of the respondents obtained tertiary institution certificates, ranging from OND to PhD degrees, 27.3% have secondary school certificates, while 38.7% have primary school leaving certificates, 11.3% are without formal education. The educational composition of the respondents is a clear indication that they are knowledgeable enough to participate in the planning, implementation and operation of rural development projects.

Fig 3: Respondents Level of Education

Respondents Occupational Structure

The occupation of the inhabitants of the study area cannot be over emphasized; in fact it has a positive correlation with any successful participation and completion of self-help projects and rural development. In the course of the field survey, it was revealed that about 84.3% are in the informal sector like farming, trading, self employed work and business like driving, security, blacksmithing etc. While just about 15.3% are civil servants (Fig 4). This type of occupational structure afford people more time to participate in self-help projects that the
community embark upon in terms of direct labour than the civil servants and the self employed.

Fig 4: Respondents Occupational Structure
Distribution of respondents’ average income
Income is a major determinant of any development project in any area. The higher the income of the people, the more they contribute to the development of their community as this is revealed in the result of the administered questionnaire in the study area. The field survey indicated that 14.7% of the respondents earn less than 6,000, about 73.4% of the respondents earn between 6,000 to 20,000, while 12% earn 20,000 and above (Fig 5). With this type of income distribution; it is likely that more people will be able to contribute financially to self-help projects in the study area.

Fig 5: Distribution of respondents’ average income
Identified Projects available in the Study Area
There are different types of project participated in by rural people. This is based on the peculiar needs and capacities of different communities in the study area. These include market, electricity/water, health centres, schools, road construction and others. Table 1 shows a representation of functional community development projects available in Ahiazu Mbaise
LGA. It is clear from the analysis that respondents in the study area tend to concentrate their development on those areas that will have effect on individuals and tend to develop their future economy. Hence, the self help projects in the study area include building of health centres (33.3%), road construction (18.7%), electricity and water supply (17.3%), building of schools (16.0%), markets (8.0%) and other projects such as motor parks, town halls etc (6.7%).

It is therefore noteworthy to state that despite the disperse nature of facilities in the study area, their availability cannot be denied. For rural community projects that are non-functional or performing below capacity, restoration is required just as noted by Ofuoku (2011) that rural communities in Nigeria have a lot of dysfunctional infrastructural facilities which need to be refurbished.

### Table 1: Identified Projects available in the Study Area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Market</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity /Water supply</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>17.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Centres</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Road construction</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### Levels of Community Participation in Rural Development

The study investigated different levels of community involvement in infrastructural development in the study area and the result is presented in Table 2. It is interesting to note that 48 respondents (32%) gained enlightenment about the communal infrastructures. While (28.7%) of the sampled population engaged themselves in consultation with people (their sons and daughters) in government in order to lobby them to assist in the developmental projects.

It is quite regrettable that (12.7%) of the respondents did not participate in any form. This suggests that some people are more concerned about their personal welfare than the provision of infrastructural facilities that can benefit the entire community. The people that jointly planned for infrastructural development constitute just (10%) of the sampled population. This is quite discouraging. It is obvious that collective bargaining and execution of projects would assist the community to achieve greater heights. 9.3% of the respondents reported that they usually sought for technical advice, while 7.3% of the respondents reported that they were involved in the control and maintenance of the facilities. This level of participation should be encouraged at the grass-root where the community can build their capacity in maintaining existing infrastructures. A cross-examination of the communities indicated that level of participation in infrastructural development is rather low in the study area.
Table 2: Level of Community Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels of Participation</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joint Plan</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Advice</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultation</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>28.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assume Control</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enlightenment</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>32.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Participation</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Contribution to the Sustainability of Infrastructural Facilities

The study examined the ways and means the respondents assist in infrastructural sustainability. The result is presented in Table 3. The result shows that fund raising towards the maintenance of the infrastructural facilities outweighs other areas of assistance. Perhaps the major source of maintenance and sustaining infrastructural facilities in the study area is by raising funds through levy, launching and donation from philanthropists, this constitutes about (38.7%) of the sampled population. This is strictly followed by provision of adequate security which accounts for (17.3%). The communities do engage local vigilante groups who help in keeping surveillance on the infrastructures against theft and damages. Sometimes, communities do constitute central working committees to ensure maintenance of the facilities and this amounts to about (14.0%).

Table 3: Means of Sustaining Infrastructural Facilities in the Study Area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Means</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formation of maintenance/ supervisory committees</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness on proper use of facilities</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision of adequate security</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>17.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fund raising for maintenance</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>38.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing of abandoned projects</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other areas of assistance</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Constraints to Effective Community Participation

Table 4 shows factors perceived by respondents as besetting effective community participation in rural development. From the table it can be seen that 34% of the respondents indicated that there was little or no encouragement from the government, this is contrary to the national development plan that government should give technical and financial assistance to communities that embark upon developmental projects while 20% indicated poor and inefficient leadership on the part of the community leaders. This is particularly true in situations where the leaders are corrupt and out to enrich themselves at the expense of the masses. The most single canker worm that has eaten into the fabric of our society today is the
problem of corruption. According to Aluko (2000) it has so pervaded the nation that most Nigerians are corrupt in one way or the other.

Other factors perceived as hindrances are insufficient funds (17.3%), illiteracy (15.3%); it is obvious that rural populace suffer from high level of illiteracy which affects their ability to participate in rural development programmes. According to Kakumba and Nsingo (2008) lack of participation in development projects occur as a result of low level of education. The least perceived factor is poor enlightenment or low level of awareness which leaves them uninformed and ignorant (13.3%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constraints</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poor Enlightenment</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor and inefficient leadership</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiteracy</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient fund</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>17.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of encouragement from government</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>34.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Conclusion
This paper has appraised community participation in rural development in Imo State with reference to Ahiazu Mbaise LGA. It is obvious that governments at all levels and development agencies have not really succeeded in mobilizing and creating desired awareness on how community participation should be addressed and achieved. Effective community participation is unlikely to occur without serious attention from the government. Proper channels towards implementing necessary community participation strategies should be strictly adhered to in order to deal with the prevailing challenges. According to Nekwaya (2007) community participation is the bedrock of rural development. The cornerstone of community based development initiatives lies in the active participation of community members, a robust sustainability plan and also enabling policy environment. Experience from the developed economies has shown that a sound rural development policy must be sustainable, efficient and affordable. The World Bank (2004) asserts that the present era is largely dominated by efforts towards promoting citizens’ participation in community development, which would require a fundamental shift in attitudes and techniques, thereby encouraging planning with the communities at the grass-root.

Recommendations
The need for enhancing and encouraging community participation in rural development cannot be overemphasized. To this end, this study made the following recommendations:

The need for positive leadership cannot be overstated. Positive leadership is needed to bring leaders and the led together to harness resources to effect changes in their communities. What this means is that leadership should be selfless and visionary, ready to subordinate their personal interests for group interest. Both material and human resources cannot be put into
productivity use on their own, unless they are combined effectively by leadership to achieve rural development.

There is need to mobilize and create awareness through mass media, seminars and workshops about the relevance of community participation in rural development. Citizens and most especially the beneficiaries of any development project or programme should be encouraged and educated through intensive public enlightenment on the importance of community participation in infrastructural development.

The study recommends that the old development paradigm in Nigeria should give way for a new paradigm that hinges on empowerment of the people to make choices and carry out bottom-up approach to development.

There is need to involve the communities at the grass-root in project formulation, planning and implementation. It is obvious that projects embarked upon by community themselves could be better managed and sustained.

The Federal Government should be doing better if it creates an independent and permanent agency for rural development in the country. The agency will be charged with the responsibility of planning with the people and executing with them all rural development programmes and/or projects. The rural development agency will be funded by the Federal Government.

Also, tapping the creative potentials within the rural setting in terms of the talents, skills, and resource endowment and direct such resources towards changing the rural environment for the better is advocated.

References