



ASSESSING THE LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION IN THE SUCCESS OF AGRICULTURAL INITIATIVES IN THE RURAL AREAS OF THE NIGER DELTA GEOPOLITICAL ZONE, IN NIGERIA

AMAFADE U. G, UMEHAI, M. C, EROMEDOGENE, E. O, ADEOTI, V. I, OGHOLU W, AND ADEOTI, J. T

Email: amafade-ughwe@delsu.edu.ng

<https://orcid.org/0009-0004-2762-9308>

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ABSTRACT

This study assesses the level of community participation in agricultural initiatives in the rural areas of the Niger Delta, Nigeria, with the aim of understanding the socioeconomic characteristics of respondents, the accessibility of information on community participation, and the overall level of involvement in agricultural development projects. Utilizing a multistage random sampling technique, data were collected from 100 respondents across five selected states. Descriptive statistics and logistic regression were employed for data analysis. Findings reveal that 57.5% of respondents were male, with the majority aged between 40-49 years and engaged predominantly in farming. A significant relationship (p -value = 0.008) was identified between access to information and community participation, indicating that enhanced information availability positively influences engagement levels. On a scale of 4 to 5, community participation was rated at a mean of 3.58, reflecting active involvement in project planning and monitoring, while areas such as financial contributions were rated lower (mean = 2.39). The study recommends the adoption of inclusive strategies that empower marginalized groups, ensuring their voices are integral to agricultural initiatives. A shift from traditional top-down approaches to collaborative, bottom-up strategies is essential for fostering sustainable development and improving the livelihoods of rural communities in the Niger Delta.

KEYWORD: Community participation, sustained development, project design, stakeholder, active participation, development initiative, project development, agricultural communities, marginalized.

INTRODUCTION

The thrust of development agenda in Nigeria since its independence has been on economic growth and poverty reduction, with the fundamental objective of ensuring the majority rural areas in Nigeria have access to development opportunities and are able to enjoy the accruing rewards. This has led to the establishment of various agricultural initiatives as majority of the populace resides in rural areas (Amafade & Ovharhe, 2024).

Community initiatives and programmes have failed to reach planned objectives because the beneficiaries were not included in the design and executions of these project/programmes. Very little participation by the local communities had been recorded as a result, community engagement is vital for concrete development in rural places, and development projects are considerably improved only when the local community plays an important role in their implementation (Nhlakanipho, 2010).

Amafade U. G., Department of Agricultural Extension, Faculty of Agriculture, Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State, Nigeria

Umehai, M. C., Department of Agricultural Extension, Faculty of Agriculture, Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State, Nigeria

Eromedoghene, E. O., Department of Agricultural Extension, Faculty of Agriculture, Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State, Nigeria.

Adeoti, V. I., Nigerian Stored Products Research Institute, Sapele, Delta State, Nigeria

Ogholu W., Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Management Sciences, Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State, Nigeria

Adeoti, J. T., Nigerian Stored Products Research Institute, Sapele, Delta State, Nigeria

Development initiatives and rural projects have been initiated in the rural and most impoverished areas in time past but living conditions continue to deteriorate. People living in rural places experience issues such as a lack of vital social services and economic opportunities (Nekwaya, 2007). Physical planning is oriented in big centers, leaving communities in rural places underrepresented in participatory planning (Okello C, 2009). The development process in rural areas is based on many distinct elements. According to Chambers and Conway (2021), rural development is a participatory process that incorporates a range of stakeholders, including development organizations, outside development practitioners, the local population, and the environment. Over a period of time, the process of rural development gives rise to a diverse range of practices. These collections of development strategies produce a variety of knowledge during this process.

Rural development is any endeavor aiming at improving and/or enhancing rural livelihoods in the social and economic spheres. It encompasses both the transformation of lives and landscape to ensure a major boost in the quality of life of the rural inhabitants. In an effort to boost their output on land where access to it is guaranteed and their income through off-farm income-generating activities, where there is potential for the generation of productive employment. Eromedoghene et al (2024), in Thorbecke (1999), argues that "the rural poor people, who represent a latent productive potential, need to be provided with an appropriate policy and institutional framework, resource and technology support, and an enabling market environment". There is no other way to do this except to provide the rural population with the requisite skills to enable them to seek other opportunities and pleasures.

Ofuoku (2011) defined participation as a process whereby stakeholders share and exert influence on development activities, as well as the decisions and resources that have an impact on them. If the impoverished are not given the chance to engage in the creation of initiatives aimed to enhance their means of livelihoods, they will persistently fail to reap the benefits of any interventions. According to Ekong (2003); Amafade et al, (2024), participation includes taking an active, if not always direct, part in decisions made by the community, being aware of issues arising in the locality, attending public meetings, trying to influence proposed measures through individual and group actions, being a member of committees and groups, and financially supporting community initiatives. The notion of community participation has become a top most important topic areas explored in numerous disciplines that demands human contribution in the growth process. Participation, as defined in this literature, refers to acts and processes undertaken by authorities or individuals to promote social growth and advancement for the benefit of community members.

In an effort to illustrate this idea, Ofuoku, (2011) established a continuum of meanings based on numerous interpretations. They portrayed participation as a process that incorporates people's control to some level at one end of the continuum, and at the other, they described it as just a tool. However, participation is a process that gives people some influence over the overall growth process (Oakley & Marsden, 2023 in Isibor, et al, 2024). They describe participation as the voluntary involvement of individuals in public programs aimed at promoting national development. However, they are not expected to actively shape the program or provide criticism of its substance.

According to Ekong (2003), community involvement is a social process in which several groups with comparable needs who may or may not reside in a certain geographic area actively seek to identify their needs, make decisions, and create mechanisms to meet those needs. One way to think about community members' involvement in a program or activity is as a continuum that ranges from extremely low to very high. Community members may, on the low, attend a health fair or other event hosted and managed by health service providers; they could also find methodical and informative family identifying needs, requesting services and supplies from the ministry of health, teaching residents how to allocate and oversee their own finances and inventories. (Giller et al, 2009, IFAD 2015).

Klerxl and Proctor, (2013); Chamber (2021) in Der Ploeg (2008) noted that for agricultural initiatives to be successful, farmers must actively participate in decision-making processes. Farmers are assisted in addressing their needs and priorities using participatory techniques such as Participatory Action Research and Participatory Rural Appraisal (Cerneia and Ayse, 2019; Guinaraes, 2009). Cooperatives and farmer-led organizations provide farmers a platform to voice their issues, share knowledge, and band together to protect their interests. Amafade et al, (2022b); Pretty et al, (2006) opined that farmers may participate in decision-making processes more effectively if they are given access to initiatives that improve their knowledge and skills, such as project management, financial literacy, and sustainable agricultural practices training programs. (IFAD, 2015). The significance of local communities in public development projects and the need of a bottom-up approach to guarantee the effectiveness and long-term sustainability of development initiatives were acknowledged at the World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (World bank, 2013). Inclusive development approaches address power imbalances, promote participation, and ensure the voices of marginalized groups are heard and considered in decision-making processes. While there are previous studies on successes of agricultural programmes in the Niger Delta region,

there is a dearth of knowledge in the level of participation by farmers.

Objective of Study

The specific objectives of the study are to:

- i. examine the socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents
- ii. determine the accessibility of information on community participation in agricultural development projects
- iii. investigate the level of community participation in agricultural development projects
- iv. level of individual participation in communities in agricultural development project

METHODOLOGY

The Niger Delta is the delta of the Niger River sitting directly on the Gulf of Guinea in Nigeria. It is located within nine coastal southern Nigerian states, which include: all six states from the South South geopolitical zone, one state (Ondo) from South West geopolitical zone and two states (Abia and Imo) from South East geopolitical zone. The delta is a region rich in petroleum, and has been the focus of global concern due to widespread contamination, this is sometimes cited as an instance of ecocide. The notable cause is major oil spills by multinational corporations of petroleum industry. The sample for this study was chosen using a multistage random sampling technique. Five States were purposefully selected which are Delta, Edo, Bayelsa, Ondo and Abia. In the second stage, one zones were selected from each of the five States, making for a total of five agricultural zones. Two LGAs were selected in the third stage from each of the selected agricultural zones, two communities were then selected from each LGA as the fourth step in the sample procedure to make up a total of twenty communities. In the last stage, five respondents were selected, this make up a total of one hundred respondents.

Data for this study were collected by the use of structured questionnaire and interview schedule. This

was administered by the researcher and trained enumerators. Objective one was achieved using descriptive statistics such as mean, median, mode, standard deviation, and frequency distribution, while objective three and four were subjected to statistical analysis by the use of frequency counts, percentage and means derived from 4 and 5-point Likert scale of never involved, rarely involved, often involved and always involved and strongly agree (SA), agree (A), undecided (U), disagree (D) and strongly disagree (SD) respectively. Objective two was investigated using logistic regression.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-economic characteristics of respondents

Table 1 shows that 57.5 percent of the responders were men and 42.5% were women. This suggests that the respondents were chosen in a nearly equal manner based on gender. This agreed with Goodluck et al., (2024) who stated that the importance of women's roles in household management and community development cannot be overstated. The majority of respondents (44.4%) are within the age group 40-49, followed by 33.2% in the 30-39 age group, 10.6% below 30, 3.79% in the 50–59 age group, and 8.2% in the 60+ age group. It is implied that the majority of the respondents are youth. The findings are consistent with those of Amafade et al. (2022), who opined that most of the people in their youthful age are within the active work force, productive in their respective communities and will be readily available to contribute significantly to the development of their community. The majority of respondents (76.3%) were married; 13.2% were single, 4.4% were divorced, and 6.3% were widowed. This demonstrates that the majority of responders were accountable. In terms of education, 51.9% had completed secondary school, 27.5% had tertiary education, and 5.6% had no formal education. This result shows that the majority of respondents are educated. Regarding occupation, the majority of respondents (41.9%) were farmers, followed by artisans (30%), civil servants (18.2%), traders (8.2%), and pensioners (1.7%).

Table 1: Socio-economic characteristics of respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	92	57.5
Female	68	42.5
Age		
<30	17	10.6
30-39	53	33.2
40-49	71	44.4
50-59	6	3.75
60 and above	13	8.2
Marital status		
Married	122	76.3
Single	21	13.2
Divorced	7	4.4
Widowed	10	6.3
Education		
No formal education	9	5.6
Primary education	24	15
Secondary education	83	51.9
Tertiary education	44	27.5
Occupation		
Farming	67	41.9
Trading	13	8.2
Civil servant	29	18.2
Artisan	48	30
Retirees	3	1.7

The level of Information Accessibility on Community Participation in Agricultural Development Project

The objectives aimed to ascertain the impact of information accessibility on community engagement in public development initiatives. It is crucial to acknowledge that information is vital for the growth of any project, as argued by Amafade et al., (2024b). They assert that the success of a project is largely

influenced by the amount of information individuals receive about the project in advance. The data presented in Table 2 demonstrates that a significant proportion of the participants expressed satisfaction (3.6623) with their level of knowledge on community involvement and public progress, which can be attributed to the quantity of information provided. They also observed that the accessibility to information within their communities was sufficient.

Table 2. Information accessibility on community participation in agricultural development project

Statement	Mean	Std Deviation
Your awareness of public development and community participation is adequate.	3.6623	1.01241
Do you believe that knowing about community development projects has affected how much you participate in them?	3.2851	.71823
Does having sufficient knowledge about public development projects lead to increased community participation?	3.5046	1.19371
There is positive public project delivery when there is effective community participation	3.8826	1.06323
Incomplete or inaccurate information can lead to misinterpretation, inaccuracies and deviance from public project directions.	3.5932	.77321
Effective methods for guaranteeing the successful implementation of public projects include top-down information sharing	3.7683	1.08941
Do you support that community members should be involved in the design and execution of public development projects	3.7855	1.09382
Is there a need for improvement in the access to information about public development project in your community	3.5539	1.25584
Will community members participate more in public project development if information access is improved	3.2134	1.17337
Do access to these information build trust and transparency in implementing community development projects	3.6808	1.132652

Level of Community Participation in Agricultural Development Projects

The result in table 3 shows that the community have sufficient understanding of how communities participate in public development project with a mean value of 3.3120. The finding also indicate with a mean value of 3.5828 that the communities are actively involved in agricultural development projects. It was also observed that there is a relationship between community participation and positive performance of agricultural development projects (4.1362). Data from the study also revealed that participation of

communities in project development invariably leads to project sustainability (4.0342). It was also agreed that projects implementation may suffer if communities are not involved in both the planning and implementation of projects (4.1749) and also that information regarding projects are readily made available by government agencies (3.5523). Standard deviations were computed to indicate the level of scatteredness of the item answers around the means. All the items had standard deviations of less than 1 apart from one item that had a significantly bigger variance of 5.0000. Standard deviations of less than 1 signified a little variance in the item replies whereas that of 5.000 indicated that the respondents considerably differed in their responses.

Table 3: Level of community participation in agricultural development projects

Statement	Mean	Std Deviation
Do the community have a sufficient understanding of how communities participate in public development	3.3120	.86873
In your neighborhood, the community is actively involved in public development projects.	3.5828	.81342
Performance of public projects is related with successful community involvement in public development initiatives	4.1362	5.0122
Project performance may suffer as a result of low community involvement in public development initiatives.	4.1749	.94512
Government representatives are always being sought after by the community for information regarding public development projects.	3.5523	.84623
Public development projects become sustainable when the community is involved.	4.0342	.92164
Community involvement is crucial for public development projects	3.9864	.79423

Hypothesis testing

The study attempted to evaluate the hypothesis which said that "access to information does not significantly influence community participation in public development projects in Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The study found a significant (p -value=0.008) positive correlation (0.322) between availability of information and community engagement in public development initiatives as shown in Table 2; the hypothesis was rejected. The connection was significant at the 0.05

level of significance (2-tailed). This implies that there is a considerable relationship between access to information and community participation. Therefore, an increase in access to information leads to increase in community participation in public development projects. The finding is similar with the study conducted by Anwar Shah (2007) who claims that access to information plays a significant role in empowering communities and boosting their engagement in public development.

Table 4: Relationship between access to information and participation in agricultural development projects

Variable		Access to information	Community participation
Access to information	Person correlation	1	.322**
	Sig(2tailed)		.008
	N	91	69
Participation	Person correlation	.332**	1
	Sig(2tailed)	.008	
	N	80	80

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Level of Individual participation in communities in agricultural development project

Table 5's findings demonstrate that the respondents actively participated in the identification of agricultural development projects, starting with the initial stages (mean = 2.6), community members' idea sharing (mean = 2.59), decision-making and project planning (mean = 2.51), labor provision (mean = 2.67), and project monitoring (2.65). They are rarely involved in the project's financial contribution stages (mean = 2.39), fund-raising procedures (mean = 2.18), or site clearing (mean = 2.26). The study's results also showed that they were constantly active in choosing

project locations (mean = 2.76), as well as in securing the necessary materials (mean = 2.56). The present findings are similar with the research undertaken by Amartya, (2017), who underlined the value of individual involvement in project design as a strategy for reaching sustainable development. Amartya believed that more freedom and better development results result from allowing people the chance to influence their own development priorities and take part in decision-making processes. Sherry, (2021) explored further the advantages of public involvement in community development programs. His studies made evident that incorporating the public to the planning and execution process boosts development projects' sustainability, accountability, and sense of ownership.

Table 5: Level of participation individuals in the community in agricultural development project

Participation variable	Score	Mean
Identification of projects	330	2.6
Sharing of idea among members of the community	350	2.59
Taking decision on project planning	319	2.51
Monetary contribution	510	2.39
Arranging for fund raising	351	2.18
Clearing project site	401	2.26
Labour	349	2.67
Selecting the project location	441	2.69
Impute supply	400	2.14
Monitoring of ongoing project	381	2.65

Cut-off score = > 2.5. (2.5 = often involved; >2.5 = always involved; 1.99-2.49 = rarely involved;
*The lowest limit of the mean used to make decisions is known as the cut-off score.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study underscores the critical role of community participation in agricultural development projects within Nigeria's Niger Delta region. The findings reveal that community members possess a strong understanding of their involvement in development initiatives and recognize the positive correlation between access to information and active participation. With a significant majority of respondents indicating satisfaction with their knowledge of community engagement, it is evident that improved information accessibility enhances participatory practices. Moreover, the study highlights that individual participation in various stages of project implementation, particularly in decision-making and monitoring, is essential for achieving sustainable outcomes. However, it also points to areas where participation is lacking, such as financial contributions and fundraising efforts. To foster meaningful community engagement, it is imperative to implement inclusive strategies that empower marginalized groups and enhance their capacities. Ultimately, this research advocates for a shift from traditional top-down approaches to a more collaborative, bottom-up strategy in rural development, ensuring that local voices are integral to the planning and execution of

agricultural initiatives that directly impact their livelihoods.

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