Community Participation in Nigerian Infrastructure Development

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Introduction

Infrastructure such as electricity, roads, telecommunications, railways, irrigation, water supply, sanitation, ports and airports, storage facilities, oil and gas pipelines, etc. are the major targets of development in most societies around the world (Pernia, 2012). This is because both citizens and governments can only function effectively when these items are adequately provided, improved, and maintained. Therefore, the development of this infrastructure in communities in Nigeria appears to have constituted a fundamental issue over a long period of time among federal, state, and local governments, non-governmental organizations, and concerned citizens who are now clamoring for the fundamental development of both urban and rural settlements as an important step to economic development and recovery. Examples of this infrastructure are roads, power, ICT, water, transportation systems, communication networks, sewage, and electric systems (Popoola et al., 2022).

The concept of infrastructural development refers to the provision and improvement of infrastructure in communities in order to satisfy the material needs and aspirations of the community dwellers. Infrastructure, according to Ojei-Ubana (2020), refers to the basic systems and services that a country needs in order to function properly. The level of economic buoyancy of a nation largely depends on the condition of its infrastructural facilities (Ojo et al., 2019). Level of development is largely measured by the level of infrastructural facilities endowment as well as the condition (Ojo et al., 2019). However, observations suggest that infrastructural development can be achieved and sustained with the involvement of the community residents who are the primary beneficiaries of the developmental process.

Local government areas in Nigeria have witnessed numerous infrastructural challenges due to several factors ranging from governance, poor funding, political instability, residents' attitudes, and community participation, among others. Among these challenges, community participation is discussed in this paper in relation to local infrastructural development.

In spite of the efforts of government agencies like the National Orientation Agency (NOA) and government-owned and privately owned radio and television stations to sensitize community residents on the need to participate in both social and economic development of their community, the paper identifies continuing concerns about limited community participation in infrastructural development. There appears to be a general belief that the development of a community in terms of the provision and maintenance of some infrastructure, such as health care services, schools, roads, electricity, potable water, good markets, and many more, is the sole responsibility of the government in power, and therefore there is no reason for them to be involved in the developmental process. Past and present governors have held a series of town hall meetings with the stakeholders of the communities, television programmes, and printed statements to sensitise people on the need to actively participate in programmes meant for the development of their communities, either through the government or non-government organizations. However, these calls and meetings seem not to have yielded the results expected, as there is poor participation of community residents in community development services. This is evident in the abandoned projects discussed in relation to local government areas.

Collective deliberations among community leaders on the progress and development of their environment (community) indicate that government efforts alone may not be sufficient to cover the needs of citizens. In line with this, there is a need for the residents to join hands with the community leaders and the government in the development of their communities by contributing services, money, materials and labour; attending consultations; exercising delegated decision-making powers; and participating in problem identification and implementation.

The availability of and access to education, business, transportation, communication, electrification, a good road network, security services, entrepreneurship programmes, and job opportunities vary from community to community. In a bid to fill the gap created by this uneven distribution of opportunities to social, educational, and economic services, some residents, through their leaders, often come together to provide alternative solutions to their community challenges after clear indications that the government at the local government area, state, and federal levels has yet to attend to their challenges or that the attention given seems not to be enough to proffer an adequate solution to the problems being faced within the community. This has led to the formation of different community unions and associations to contribute their quota to the development of their community, i.e., community landlord associations and union leaders, among others.

Effective participation of community members in infrastructural developmental programmes can be ensured during activities such as problem identification, planning, implementation, and sustainability. Infrastructure availability varies, so identifying the projects a community needs is an essential first

step. This explains the necessity for the project initiator to consider the needs of a community before embarking on such developmental projects. For example, in Ekiti State, former governor Kayode John Fayemi initiated a meeting with community leaders and members of the society known as a “town hall meeting,” where the governor interacted with the people of the community to seek their opinions on pressing needs of the community before embarking on such social developmental programmes. This not only familiarised the government with the community but also encouraged the active participation of the community in the project’s planning, implementation, and sustainability. In some cases, community residents or their representatives complain that the project initiator does not give them the opportunity to discuss what their needs are before embarking on a project. This may hinder the effective participation of the community in developmental projects because their needs are not met. To ensure the sustainable development of a community, both rural and urban residents are expected to make a substantial contribution to the development of their communities, which is essential to the overall development of society.

Although community participation alone cannot guarantee success, infrastructure development also requires technical processes and substantial capital. However, the involvement of the community in the development of infrastructural facilities can help ensure that local needs are met and thus improves the effectiveness of infrastructural developmental projects.

Community members may participate less effectively when they are excluded from decisions about infrastructure development. This review examines the challenges and possible solutions to the effective participation of community members in infrastructural development in local government areas of Nigeria. It considers infrastructure provision, the extent of participation and possible responses to barriers in Nigerian local government areas.

Conceptual Framework and Literature Review

Infrastructure and Infrastructural Development

Infrastructure has been seen by many as a key element in driving development in any nation. Infrastructure refers to the basic physical and organizational structures and facilities needed for the operation of a society (Aladejana et al., 2021). These include roads, education, health facilities, electricity, potable water, cottage industries, marketing facilities, microfinance facilities, and communication. Infrastructure tends to be a high-cost investment and is vital to economic development and prosperity. Thus, these facilities can be described as the basic pre-requisites to any development (Olusa, 2021). Infrastructure comprises public goods and services that go into the production process as complementary inputs for traditional factors of production such as capital,

labor, and entrepreneurship. They help increase returns on investment by reducing production costs and improving transaction efficiency. Infrastructure can be referred to as physical and organizational structures and facilities considered crucial in ensuring the security of any nation, its citizens' health and safety, and its economy's growth (Davies et al., 2019). It can be grouped into two categories: hard and soft infrastructure. Hard infrastructure is the physical infrastructure of roads, sewers, highways, bridges, electricity, railroads, etc., while soft infrastructure deals with human capital and the establishments that cultivate infrastructure, such as universities (Davies et al., 2019).

Infrastructure is composed of public and private physical structures such as roads, railways, bridges, tunnels, water supplies, sewers, electrical grids, and telecommunications (including Internet connectivity and broadband access). In general, infrastructure can be understood as the physical components of interconnected systems that provide essential services, support living conditions and help maintain the surrounding environment.

Infrastructural development in developing countries has not been given adequate attention by successive governments in Africa, and the Nigerian government cannot be exonerated for this. Some scholars have even acknowledged the important role of infrastructure in stimulating foreign direct investment; among them are Wheeler and Mody (1992), Loree and Guisinger (1995), Boccanfuso et al. (2014), Morisset and Pirnia (2000), Asiedu (2002), and Olufemi et al. (2013). These scholars argued that infrastructural development is a necessary condition for foreign investors to operate successfully, as poor infrastructural development increases costs for firms. Infrastructure should therefore improve the investment climate for foreign companies by subsidising the costs of investment by foreign investors and increasing their ROI (return on investment). As the availability of good infrastructure like roads, railways, highways, ports, communication networks, and electricity with a stable polity would increase productivity and thereby attract higher levels of investment, Wei (2000), cited in Olufemi et al (2013), opined that "locations with good infrastructure are more attractive than the others".

Asiedu (2002) concluded that with good infrastructural development, countries were rewarded with more investments. However, for a country like Nigeria with many nearby developing countries, infrastructural development could be a comparative advantage to attract investment. According to Edun (2002), this is why it is imperative for the country to invest more in infrastructural facilities and try to bring down the escalating price of cement with incentives for investors to enter the building material market; it is this infrastructural development that will act as the foundation for the attraction of foreign investors to the most populous nation in Africa.

Community Participation

Community participation has been a widespread term in development and management all over the world, as evidenced by the policy guidelines of many countries (Jepkemoi, 2018). This has been geared towards tapping the potential of the people and improving their living standards. It has been perceived as a positive move, particularly in developing countries where the majority of the population still lives in undeveloped rural areas (Sei, 2016). Thus, community participation has been an important component of community development and reflects 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 participate in programmes designed to improve the quality of their lives.

Community participation refers to an active process whereby beneficiaries influence the direction and execution of development projects rather than merely receiving a share of project benefits (Adesida & Okunlola, 2015; Adejo, 2014). In the same vein, community participation provides an enabling environment for sustainability by allowing users to select the level of services for which they are willing to pay, to guide key investment and management decisions, and to commit resources in support of the choices (Adesida & Okunlola, 2015; Sara & Katz, 2004). This requires the 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).

Abiona and Bello (2013) refer 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, the planning of programmes, and their implementation. It emphasizes total control by the community members and a lesser degree of government imposition of projects on the people (community) by allowing the community to do the work among them without external assistance.

Levels and Modes of Community Participation

Community participation is important in infrastructure development, as this encourages both implementation and sustainability of the infrastructure. It is therefore important to understand the levels and modes of community participation in the development process. Theron (2005) states that some levels are more relevant than others to ensure authentic public participation. These approaches

become more relevant when the impact of participation is assessed in relation to a programme or project, and the degree of participation becomes a central feature in this regard (Fokane, 2008). The seven levels of community participation as highlighted by Theron (2005) are as follows:

1. Passive participation. Passive strategies very often involve a one-way flow of information from the planners to the public (Kumar, 2002). People "participate" by being told what is going to happen or has already happened. Participation refers to a unilateral top-down approach by the authorities. The information being shared belongs to outsiders or professionals.

2. Participation in information giving. This level does not constitute community participation because it merely requires the community to judge a finished or almost finished product. People participate by answering questions posed in questionnaires, telephone interviews, or similar public participation strategies. The public does not have the opportunity to influence proceedings as the findings of the research are neither shared nor evaluated for accuracy.

3. Participation by consultation. People are consulted by professionals, planners or external officials who listen to their views. The professionals define both problems and solutions and may modify them in light of the people's responses. The process does not include any participation by the public in decision-making, nor are the professionals under any obligation to take people's views into account.

4. Participation for material incentives. People participate by providing resources, for example labour, in return for material rewards. This helps to reduce overall costs, and participants in return receive a resource (Nampila, 2005). This typology takes place in rural environments, where, for example, farmers provide the fields but are not involved in the experiment or learning process. The people have no stake in prolonging the activities when the incentives end.

5. Functional participation. People participate in a group context to meet predetermined objectives related to the project, which may involve the development or promotion of externally initiated social organisations. Such involvement does not tend to occur at the early stages of project cycles or planning, but rather after major decisions have been made. These institutions tend to be dependent on external initiators and facilitators, but may also become self-dependent.

6. Interaction strategies. People participate in a joint analysis, the development of action plans and capacity building. Participation is seen as a right, not just the means to achieve project goals.

7. Self-mobilization strategies. People participate by taking initiatives independent of external institutions to change systems. This bottom-up approach allows people to develop contacts with external institutions for resources and the technical advice they need, but they themselves retain

control over how resources are used. Such self-initiated, bottom-up and self-reliant mobilization and collective actions may or may not challenge an existing inequitable distribution of wealth and power.

Participation in Project Planning and Implementation

Active community participation in project planning and implementation may improve project design through the use of local knowledge, increase project acceptability, produce a more equitable distribution of benefits, promote local resource mobilization, and help ensure project sustainability (Adesida & Okunlola, 2015).

Okafor (2011) affirmed that with community participation, the people decide, act, and reflect on their actions as conscious subjects. This implies that community participation is expected to result in better design and execution of projects, cost-effective and timely delivery of project inputs, and a more equitable distribution of project benefits (Adesida & Okunlola, 2015). Ogunleye-Adetona and Oladeinde (2013) argued that community participation in project planning and implementation is generally acknowledged as a vital input for the socio-economic transformation of rural areas.

Steve and Olufemi (2011) investigated the prioritisation of community participation strategies for health development among some rural communities in Kogi State, Nigeria. The findings highlighted the existing participation strategies in the study area, which include: provision of free labour for construction and maintenance of health units; payment for selected services; and ad hoc fundraising, respectively. In the same vein, Olaleye (2010) examined the determinants of citizens' participation in community development through self-help projects. The study established that self-help projects are an organ of national and community development programmes that have improved the conditions of rural communities.

Challenges of Infrastructure Development in Nigeria

Nigeria faces many challenges in the area of infrastructural development. Many factors are responsible for the inadequate infrastructure provision in Nigeria, such as but not limited to: poor funding; poor governance; corruption; economic sabotage; poor maintenance culture; population explosion; and neglect of urban and regional planning laws (Olaseni and Alade, 2012). The following discussion draws on the historical analysis of Oyedele (2012) and related sources; its figures describe that period.

Funding: Funding was identified as a major challenge to infrastructural development in Nigeria for

decades. As the country's population soars, demand for additional infrastructure in all sectors also increases. Unfortunately, the public resources can hardly meet the increasing demand. Consequently, government had relied on foreign loans to complement budgetary allocations in the provision of infrastructure. This situation had contributed to the country's indebtedness over the years. At the inception of the fourth republic in 1999, Nigeria's foreign debt profile was over $40bn. The cited discussion describes earlier debt relief followed by renewed borrowing to finance infrastructure in critical sectors of the economy.

Population Explosion: Nigeria's population is now 167 million and growing at 3.2% per year. The physical and social infrastructure required to support this huge population is enormous and requires huge funding. The huge population, described in that source as more than 50% urban, has placed undue pressure on existing infrastructure and on governments' budgets over the years. Thus, the infrastructure base is grossly inadequate and suffers from deferred maintenance. Besides, the Nigerian government has failed over time to integrate population policy with overall development planning. The shortfall in infrastructural provision affects the economy negatively, lowers productivity in every sector, and aggravates the poverty profile of the country.

Poor Governance. Apart from poor funding, the poor system of governance in the country is largely responsible for the poor state of infrastructure in all sectors. To realise the 2020 vision, the country's economy was expected to grow at 14% per year, but the cited 2011 discussion reported growth of 7%. The low GDP growth is largely due to inefficient allocation and poor management of the country's human and natural resources (The Punch, 2011). The historical discussion also identified governance arrangements as a constraint on grassroots infrastructure development. The paper's cited analysis links state control of local-government operations and finances to limits on local infrastructure investment. This argument is presented in its historical context rather than as a statement of current law.

Corruption and Economic Sabotage: Corruption has become a major socio-economic problem in Nigeria with negative effects on infrastructural development. Embezzlement of funds allocated for infrastructural development is a common feature in public offices. Also, many projects for which funds have been allocated and released were never completed while inflation of project costs is a common experience. The case of abandoned projects is common because civil servants in charge of such projects collect bribes from contractors and this either results in sub-standard jobs or abandonment. According to the cited Transparency International Report on Bribe Tax Payers Index for 2011, Nigerian civil servants received $3bn in bribes in 2010. Indeed, the private companies were also said to be involved in such economic crimes (Saturday Punch, 2011 cited in Olaseni & Alade, 2012).

Economic sabotage: Vandalism of public facilities has negatively impacted the nation's economy. Vandals' activities are regularly observed along oil pipelines and power transmission lines. In the same vein, the plundering of the country's gas resources due to the failure of foreign oil companies to invest in infrastructure to utilise natural gas is an act of economic sabotage and needs to be checked. Gas flaring not only wastes a potentially valuable source of energy; it also adds significant carbon emissions to the atmosphere. The cited discussion linked efficient resource use to Nigeria's then-stated ambition to join the twenty largest economies (Olaseni & Alade, 2012).

Dearth of Visionary Leaders: Visionary leaders are the builders of a new dawn, working with imagination, insight, and boldness. They present a challenge that calls forth the best in people and brings them together around a shared sense of purpose. Visionary leaders are change agents. The cited authors associated limited transformative leadership with infrastructure shortfalls (Olaseni & Alade, 2012).

Capital Flight, Capital Sink and Capital Stagnancy: Infrastructure development projects in Nigeria suffer from capital flight, capital sink, and capital stagnancy. Many materials and managerial services are procured outside the country. The contracts are full of loopholes that allow leakages of funds. In some cases, there is over-design for the designers to earn more professional fees, which are a percentage of the contract sum. Capital stagnancy due to abandoned projects is also rampant.

Project Management: The project management approach to project delivery evolved in the late 1950s in the United States of America (USA), when it was first used by the American Army for military project execution. The success recorded through the project management approach in the defence sector led to its establishment as a reliable method of project delivery in other sectors like construction, manufacturing, health information technology (IT), media, pharmaceuticals, education, and entertainment (Oyedele, 2012). The approach was introduced in the United Kingdom (UK) in the early sixties. Countries like Hong Kong, Malaysia, Canada, and Ireland have adopted this approach, but the cited discussion describes its adoption as limited in developing countries, especially in Nigeria. Risk management is necessary for all Nigerian projects.

Responses to Infrastructure Development Challenges

The desire for true patriotic leadership in Nigeria is most needed to ensure sustainable infrastructure development. The Nigerian government must commit to providing good governance and ensuring public infrastructure is well protected, managed, and maintained. Ongoing and future developments should be closely monitored while ensuring that the projects are awarded on merit and that practical

timelines are given and strictly followed for completion (Oyedele, 2012).

The government should continue in its fight against corruption and address excessive government spending. Saved resources could be directed to providing infrastructure for the overall growth of the economy. Also, government facilities should be appropriately managed and put to effective and efficient use. In addition, abandoned projects should be resuscitated, and less impactful projects, where necessary, should be curtailed. Furthermore, credit facilities for infrastructural projects should be made easily accessible with minimum interest rates. This will serve as a boost to investment in road construction, health-care facilities, schools, markets, transportation, potable water, communication, electricity, sporting facilities, etc.

Conclusion

The infrastructural development of a society is a determining factor in its economic progress. This is because infrastructure facilities are a source of attraction for both local and foreign investors, who, through their projects, improve the standard of living of the host communities. Infrastructure may be provided by the government, but its success and sustainability largely depend on the host community. It is therefore imperative that the involvement of community members at every stage of infrastructural development becomes necessary for the successful infrastructural development of communities in Nigeria. In providing a sense of direction, the active participation of community members could also serve as a measure to reduce the harmful effects of uncompleted, poorly maintained, and unsustainable infrastructural developments in Nigeria. To achieve this goal, there is a need to ensure effective participation in infrastructural development that will influence society positively. Against this backdrop, the paper examined the factors influencing the participation of community members in infrastructural development in Nigeria.

Recommendations

There should be concerted efforts towards strengthening community participation in infrastructural development now that it is realised that it could be yet another strategy to transform rural communities. There is a need to mobilize and create awareness through mass media, seminars, and workshops about the need for community participation. Also, tapping the creative potentials within the rural setting in terms of talents, skills, and resource endowment and directing such resources towards changing the rural environment for the better is advocated.

There is a need to involve the communities at the grassroots in project formulation, planning, and

implementation. It is obvious that projects embarked upon by the communities themselves could be better managed and sustained.

Members of the community can be employed to work hand-in-hand with the project developers and allow them to handle some aspects of the projects, thereby building the capacity of the rural people. The Fadama projects initiated by the United Nations in conjunction with the Federal Government of Nigeria are a step in the right direction since communities are given the latitude to choose the projects that best suit their environment and are supported by the external agency to develop such projects. The local communities are working as partners in progress with experts in such fields, and it can lead the rural people to be self-reliant in managing and sustaining the facilities that are made available for them. The government should be reminded of the national policy of egalitarianism, which is entrenched in the third national development plan that no man shall be discriminated against either by tribal, religious, political affiliation, or location. If this is the guiding principle, then local projects should not be embroiled in local politics, which often leads to the abandonment of essential infrastructural facilities resulting from political instabilities.

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