



*International Journal of Development and Sustainability*

Online ISSN: 2186-8662 – [www.isdsnet.com/ijds](http://www.isdsnet.com/ijds)

Volume 1 Number 3 (2012): Pages 912-923

ISDS Article ID: IJDS12100302



Special Issue: Development and Sustainability in Africa – Part 1

# Community leadership and the challenges of community development in Nigeria: The case of Boki local government area, Cross River State

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## Abstract

This study examines the level and extent to which community leaders contribute towards successful community development projects in Boki Local Government Area, Cross River State. A total of 150 community leaders selected through multi-stage sampling technique participated in the study. Frequency counts, percentage, Group Arithmetic Mean and Mean Weight Value were utilized in realizing the objectives of the study. It was observed that leadership positions are not the exclusive preserve of a particular sex, age group, marital status or educational status; rather result indicated that the duration of residence of community leaders is a significant factor in the success of community development projects in the study area. The study concluded that knowledge on the level to which community leaders have participated in community development, and the challenges they face have serious implications for achieving sustainable community development projects. It was recommended among others that for sustainable community development to be achieved in the area, specific and deliberate strategies should be evolved to remedy some of the problems identified. The study suggests that more and dedicated community leaders should be identified and responsibilities aimed at improving the welfare of the people assigned to them.

**Keywords:** Leadership, Leadership challenges, Community development, Community development projects

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**Cite this paper as:** Udensi, L.O., Udoh, O.S., Daasi, G.L.K. and Igbara, F.N. (2012), "Community leadership and the challenges of community development in Nigeria: The case of Boki local government area, Cross River State", *International Journal of Development and Sustainability*, Vol. 1 No. 3, pp. 912-923.

## 1. Introduction

Achieving a successful or sustainable community development project in Cross River State has been on discourse for many years, but due to the challenges faced, its maximum goals are yet to be actualized. Central to the challenges of community development is the issue of leadership (Governance) which believed to pose a threat to successful community development, citizens' participation, mobilization and involvement in decision making in community development projects.

Community development occurs when people strengthen the bounds within their neighbourhoods, build social networks, and form their own organizations to provide a long-term capacity for problem solving (Rubin and Rubin, 2001). Community members who have the capacity to do something to enhance their quality of life are portrayed as having the ability to think, to decide, to plan and to take action in determining their lives. It is often argued that, in any community development programme both economic and individual growth must be given equal attention so as to ensure that the process of community development achieves its due balance, continuity and sustainability through its power structure (leadership).

Various community development literature have been dedicated to community leaders and their role in local communities (Williams, 1989; Israel and Beaulieu, 1990; Ugboh, 2007; Zaharah and Abu, 2008; Ozor and Nwankwo, 2008). In his analysis of community leaders, Fariborz et al. (2009) states that "a community without leadership may not be equipped to mobilize resources or influence tourism planning which obviously is also an aspect of community development". He further argued that, local communities, like other organizations cannot progress successfully without active and dynamic leaders who are willing and able to take initiative. To him also, the success of the local community initiative depends on the quality, creativity and commitment of its leadership in maintaining its daily affairs. In line with the view of Fariborz (2009), many scholars contend that promoting local leadership to help make communities better places to live should be one of the primary purposes of community development (Also see Bolton, 1991; Kirk and Kraft, 2004; Mills, 2005). Several other literatures in community leadership such as Rost, 1991; Robinson, 1994; Langone and Rohs, 1995; Kouzes and posner, 1995; Northouse, 1997; Price and Behrens, 2003 collectively suggest that, community leadership emphasizes a collaborative, on-going, influential process based on the relationships between people. But contemporary views on community leadership emphasize the need for citizens to voice their opinions and thoughts in shaping the decisions and policies that affect their lives (Rost, 1991; Robinson, 1994; Langone, and Rohs, 1995; Kouzes and Posner, 1995; Northouse, 1997; Price and Behrens, 2003).

It may be argued that a community without leadership may not be equipped to mobilize resources or influence community development projects. Local communities according to Aref and Ma'rof (2009) cannot proceed successfully without having dynamic leaders that are willing and able to take initiatives. Lack of capable community leaders is often mentioned by local people as a barrier to community development (Aref and Ma'rof, 2008).

According to Rubin and Rubin (2001), community development is regarded as a continuous process aimed at improving the quality of life of the community. It is all about continual improvement by the people themselves to bring about change in their lives which is usually driven by its power structure. The ultimate

goal of community development therefore is to develop members' capabilities and potential to affect their well being and quality of life through maximizing resources utilization to benefit them socially and economically. This could only be achieved through effective management of community development programmes as well as having highly committed and enthusiastic leadership. Considering the role of local leaders in the success of community development projects, it can be argued that local leaders are the baseline to every successful community development project. A study in Imo State by Ozor and Nwakwo (2008) point out that the role of local leaders in community development programmes cannot be undermined. This study involves community leaders, and those individuals who were perceived as leaders of their communities, and as people who are interested and influential to the development of their communities. It therefore became imperative in this study to address the issue of community leadership challenge and provide best practices for achieving successful community development projects.

From the foregoing, this study is directly concerned with determining the level and extent to which community leaders have contributed towards successful community development projects in Boki, Cross River State. Specifically, the objectives pursued in this study are to:

- i. determine the personal characteristics of community leaders in the study area;
- ii. determine the level of participation of community leaders in successful community development projects in the study area;
- iii. identify the challenges faced by community leaders in the course of achieving a successful community development projects in the study area; and
- iv. make useful recommendations for sustainable community development projects in the study area.

## **2. Methodology**

The study was carried out in Boki Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. The multi-stage sampling method was employed in selecting 6 wards out of the 11 wards in Boki Local Government Area. In each ward, 5 villages were randomly selected, while in each village, 5 community leaders were purposively selected, thereby making it a total of 150 community leaders. The study employed a structured questionnaire and interview schedule to realise its objectives. Likert scale structure was employed. The respondents answered each statement based on scales that most described the current situation in their community. The interview was conducted with a community leader in each of the villages selected for the study using an interview guide of 5 open-ended questions. Tables, Percentages, group arithmetic mean (GAM) and mean weight values (MWV) were adopted in analysing quantitative data. Qualitative data were transcribed and sorted, and the content properly analysed.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Personal characteristics of community leaders

Table 1 shows details of personal characteristics of community leaders. Out of the 150 community leaders, the survey indicated that approximately 61% and 39.3% of the respondents were male and female respectively. About 26% were 20 – 35 years; 30% were 36 – 45 years; 24% were 46 -55 years while 21% were above 55 years of age. The respondents were predominately Christians (90%) and only about 10% were traditional worshipers, Atheist or Muslims.

Data from the same table further revealed that, a little above a half of the respondents (55.3%) were married, about a little below one-quarter (23%) were single, while less than one-quarter (22%) were divorced, separated or widowed. Also, less than one-quarter (22.7%) did not acquire any formal education while about three-quarters, a large majority (77.3%), acquired formal education. Furthermore, data in the same table show that about two-third (36%) of the respondents have resided in the community from 40 years and above; less than one-quarter (22%) have lived between 31 – 40 years; less than one-quarter (21.4%) have lived between 21 – 30 years; and a little below two-fifth (11.3%) have lived between 11-20 years; while a little below one-fifth (9.3%) have lived less than 10 years in the community.

Findings from Table 1 show that leadership positions are not the exclusive preserve of a particular sex, age group or educational status. However, respondents noted that in few cases, educational level could enhance the quality of decision taking and facilitate the understanding of crucial decision-making issues. The length or duration of residence also had a significant relationship with the category of persons considered for leadership position, and the success of any community development project.

#### 3.2. Levels of community leader's participation in community development projects

The levels of community leader's participation were obtained through careful computation, as is shown in Table 2. The various aspects of participation identified include: decision making, community mobilization, financial contribution, project legitimization, planning the project, monitoring and evaluating the project, raising funds for the project, and organizing skilled and unskilled labour for the project.

Results in Table 2 show that the level of participation by community leaders in community development project in the study area was significantly high in raising funds for the project which ranks first (25.9), followed closely by making decision (25.4). Financial contribution towards the project was ranked third with (25); accepting and approving the project ranked fourth (24.4) while community mobilization ranked fifth (23.9). However, the result show low level of participation by community leaders in organizing skilled and unskilled labour for the project which was ranked sixth (20.6), monitoring and evaluating the project was ranked seventh (20), and planning the project which was ranked eighth (19.9). From the foregoing analysis, it can be deduced that there is a high level of participation (62.55%) by community leaders in various community development projects in the study area, and this has led to the success of various project studies.

Table 1. Personal characteristics of the respondents (n=150)

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	91	60.7
Female	59	39.3
		100
<b>Age (years)</b>		
20-35	39	26
36-45	44	29.3
46-55	36	24
>55	31	20.7
		100
<b>Religion</b>		
Christianity	135	90
Islam	1	0.7
Traditional Worshippers	9	6
Others	5	3.3
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single	34	22.7
Married	83	55.3
Divorced/Separated	15	10
Widowed	18	12
		100
<b>Educational Level</b>		
No formal education	28	18.7
Primary education	32	21.3
Secondary education	37	24.7
Tertiary education	53	35.3
		100
<b>Duration of Residence (years)</b>		
<10	14	9.3
20-Nov	17	11.3
21-30	32	21.4
31-40	33	22
40>	54	36
		100

Source: Field survey, 2011

Table 2. Distribution of Respondents According to their Level of Participation in Community Development Projects (n=150)

Points	Responses		Percentage	MWV	GAM	D	Rank	Remarks
	1	2						
Scale	Effective	Non Effective						
Question								
7	117	33	78 22	25.4	23.1	2.3	2 <sup>nd</sup>	High
8	109	49	72.7 27.3	23.9	23.1	0.8	4 <sup>th</sup>	High
9	100	50	66.7 33.3	25	23.1	1.9	1 <sup>st</sup>	High
10	106	44	70.7 29.3	24.4	23.1	1.3	5 <sup>th</sup>	High
11	141	9	94 6	19.9	23.1	-3.2	8 <sup>th</sup>	Low
12	140	10	93.3 6.7	20	23.1	-3.1	7 <sup>th</sup>	Low
13	113	47	75.3 24.7	25.9	23.1	2.8	3 <sup>rd</sup>	High
14	135	15	90 10	20.6	23.1	-2.5	6 <sup>th</sup>	Low
å				185.1				

**Source:** Field Survey, 2011

MWV=Mean Weight Value

GAM=Group Arithmetic Mean

D=Difference

High if MWV is greater than GAM and the difference is positive, but low if MWV is less than GAM and the difference is negative.

### 3.3. Factors that hinder community leaders from achieving results

Data on factors that hinders community leaders from achieving results are presented in Table 3 and it outlays some of the crucial challenges identified as hindering community leaders from achieving results in the course of a community development project. The result show that out of the seven7 challenges considered, respondents perceived 5 as major challenge and 2 as not a challenge.

The most important of the challenges perceived by respondents include, lack of fund which ranked first (80.7), lack of interest in community development project by the leader was ranked second (75.8), disagreement between community leaders and community members was ranked third (75.3), non-inclusion of the community members in the planning and execution of the project by community leaders was ranked fourth (74.7) and women discrimination in leadership position was ranked fifth (70.4). Conversely, the result shows that low level of education of community leaders was not a challenge to community leaders in the course of achieving a successful community development project as it was ranked sixth (58.6) and lastly, community tradition or culture was also indicated as not posing any challenge to achieving a successful community development project in the study area (53.3).

Table 3. Distribution of respondents according to the perceived challenges faced in achieving a successful community development project (n=150)

Points Scale	Responses				Percentage	MWV	GAM	D	Rank	Remarks	
	4	3	2	1							
Question	SA	A	D	SD							
15	117	32	1	0	99.3	0.7	80.7	69.8	10.9	1st	Accepted
16	81	50	10	9	87.3	12.7	70.4	69.8	0.6	5th	Accepted
17	88	56	5	1	96	4	75.8	69.8	6	2nd	Rejected
18	80	67	3	0	98	2	75.3	69.8	5.5	3rd	Rejected
19	81	62	6	1	95.3	4.7	74.7	69.8	4.9	4 <sup>th</sup>	
20	45	38	49	18	55.3	44.7	58.6	69.8	- 11.2	6th	
21	44	29	33	44	48.7	51.3	53.3	69.8	- 16.5	7th	
$\Sigma$							488.4				

**Source:** Field Survey, 2011

MWV=Mean Weight Value

GAM=Group Arithmetic Mean

D=Difference

Accept if MWV is greater than GAM and the difference is positive, but reject if MWV is less than GAM and the difference is negative.

During the verbal interview, some of the respondents observed that certain challenges often hinder the realization of community development objectives by community leaders. They expressed their opinions as follows:

- Extract 1:** ...Money will go a long way in helping the success of any project... Most of the project carried out would have been abandoned if there was no money to finance it.
- Extract 2:** I don't think I will participate in any project I was not involved in the planning process. I don't like surprises...
- Extract 3:** A kingdom that is divided will fall... So if our leader has a disagreement with us (community members) he will fail in all that he is doing because a tree cannot make a forest...
- Extract 4:** The community is made up of both men and women. Everybody should be given opportunity to perform... discriminating against women can lead to failure in the project. After all, what a man can do, a woman can also do it.
- Extract 5:** We do not have any tradition or culture that does not like good things or development... our culture is for good and development alone.
- Extract 6:** ...I don't see education as anything that can prevent our leaders from performing in any project.

**Source:** field Interview schedule, 2011

The result or the extract from the interview is similar to the results or findings from the field survey as shown in Table 3.

#### 4. Discussion of findings

Findings from this study bring to focus that characteristic in community leaders can contribute or influence the success of community development projects or programmes. Relating to the findings of this study, Fisher (2005) stated that the characteristics of leaders have significant impact on community development, while Schultz (2004) states the importance of leader's characteristics in community development effort. One of the key characteristics as identified by one of our respondents is the period at which a leader or individual resides in the area. This finding is supported by Green et al. (1986) and Lawton (2005). Who state that, permanent residents may be more supportive of community development than seasonal residents. Lawton (2005) also adds that duration of residence in the community plays an important role in supporting community development. According to Kuponiyi (2008), actual participation of community leaders in the execution of community development projects could be a strong indicator for the progress of the project. The success of most community development project depends on community participation that is enabled by the leaders participating in the project. In line with the findings in Table3, it can be deduced that the level of participation of community leaders is a strong indicator for the success of community development projects.

Similarly, findings of this study also show that, lack of funds was a major challenge faced by community leaders in the course of achieving a successful community development project. Similarly, it has been observed by Ugboh (2007) that insufficient funds have prevented many good ideas that were developed in communities. To a large extent, as found from this study, if community leaders could not access funds it may lead to abandoned projects even as respondents noted in a study by Ozor and Nwankwo (2008), that there were many abandoned projects in the community as a result of lack of funds to complete them.

It is quite clear from the findings of this study that discrimination against women from holding leadership positions will hinder community projects. The findings of Ozor and Nwankwo (2008) confirm strongly that gender bias in community leadership adversely inhibits success in community development projects. But the outcome of studies by, Farinde et al. (2004); Ajayi and Otuya (2006) and Zaharah and Abu (2008) indicates that women possess the necessary skills and capacity to deliver good programmes in the community, and effectively accomplish community development projects. In their own studies, Zaharah and Abu (2008) observed that women, leadership relates more to a holistic and bottom-ups' approach in developing the community. This approach has a greater success and impact on community development compared to the top-down approach commonly utilized by male community leaders. In conclusion, both men and women should be involved in leadership roles in community development so that they can complement each other's effort where necessary (Ozor and Nwankwo, 2008).

Furthermore, this study shows the importance of including community members in the planning and execution of community development projects. In a similar study by Ogolo (1995), Asnarulkhadi and Fariborz (2009) and Ekong (2010), people participate in developmental projects if they share in the



identification of the development priorities, planning and implementation. However, the result of this study did not show low level of education, traditions and culture pose hindrances to community leader's efforts toward achieving results in community development projects. This was justified as respondents interviewed noted that the level of education has no relationship to successful community development projects.

## **5. Conclusion**

The importance of community leadership in community development projects in Boki Local Government Area cannot be debated. Community leadership is an important strategy enabling communities to respond to community development project through active participation and taking of responsibilities. The findings of this study show that leadership positions in the study area are not the exclusive preserve of a particular sex, age group, educational status, religion or marital status. However, duration of residence has a significant relationship with the success of community development projects in the study area. This implies that, the community under study could develop faster if many more people who have interest in the development of the community are encouraged to live there. This calls for community peace initiative and provision of rural amenities such as potable water, feeder roads, rural electricity and improved means of livelihood among others. Such amenities will encourage people to make permanent settlements in the area and in future contribute towards the development of the community. The issue of peace and harmony is necessary since nobody would like to live or invest in an area of conflict and rancour. Rural dwellers must eschew violence and embrace peace since this is one of the incidence that can make people live in the area.

Also, community leaders in the study area had participated to a great extent in community development projects. Thus their level of participation was high (62.5%). Respondent showed high level of participation in decision making, community mobilization, financial contribution, legitimizing the project, financial contribution, and raising funds for the project. However, it was observed that their level of participation was low in planning the project, monitoring and evaluating the project and organizing skilled and unskilled labour for the project. The findings from the above show that although genuine efforts have been demonstrated by the people toward community development projects, much is still need to be done to move the community forward. For instance, proper and adequate mobilization is required particularly in areas identified to have attracted less participation by the people. It points out to the fact that the elites in consonant with government agencies must step up their efforts in order to encourage full participation by the people.

Different challenges were identified as hindrances to community leaders from achieving a successful community development project. Seven challenges were identified – lack of funds, discrimination against women in leadership position, lack of leaders interest in the project, disagreement between members and leaders, non-inclusion of community members in the planning and execution of the project, low level of education, tradition and culture. On the contrary, low level of education of community leaders, tradition and culture were not considered to be significant challenge to leaders in executing community development projects in the study.

This study therefore recommends that for sustainable community development to be achieved in the area, specific and deliberate strategies should be evolved to remedy some of the problems identified. The study suggests that more and dedicated community leaders should be identified and responsibilities aimed at improving the welfare of the people assigned to them. Also, every member of the community should be made to contribute his or her quota towards community development projects, such contributions will enhance sustainability in terms of security, acceptability, usage and identification of the people with the said projects.

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