

## OPTIMUM COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AS A STRATEGY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTHWEST NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

The study examined the impact of optimum community involvement on sustainable development in Southwest Nigeria. Holistically, the study examined how optimum community involvement influenced sustainable development, in all ramifications in Southwest Nigeria. Descriptive survey design was used for this study while questionnaire was used to generate data from respondents. Findings from the study revealed that the relationship between optimum community involvement and sustainable development was high, positive, and significant ( $r = 0.921, p < 0.05$ ). The study concluded that there was a correlation between optimum community involvement as a strategy and sustainable development. It also demonstrated that optimum community involvement strategy influenced educational development, delivery of primary health care and economic development in Southwest Nigeria. The study recommended that community involvement should be given priority as it had been perceived to be sacrosanct when carrying out development projects. Development agencies should devise new communication strategies that suit the rural dwellers who do not understand English, such as the use of interpreters during community engagement.

**Keywords:** Optimum Community, Community involvement, Sustainable Development, Strategy

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development refers to any group effort in a certain area, whether by an outside organisation or the residents themselves and which has the main goal of improving that area. As the English form of a Tamal adage puts it, "if a city or area as a whole tries, the aim is reached," the movement is also about improving the quality of life for everyone in the community via the participation and, ideally, the initiative of the community itself (Ako & Ojo, 2019; Nishimura, 2017). For sustainable development to be really effective, it is essential for members of the community to be involved in the process at every stage. The principle of community involvement is an essential impetus limited not only to the assurance of success of the intervention initiative but also the sustainability of such effort and the acquisition of skills

for collective action and maintenance (Umoh & Lugga, 2018). When communities are involved in project initiation and implementation, there is the assurance of sustainability, in contrast to when they have no idea about the project or it is imposed on them (Id et al., 2021). It was confirmed that government-provided initiatives that did not include the people would not last because of the lack of commitment from the people. Since development interventions are not eternal or endless, it is only important that members of the community that will benefit from the project be included into the planned decision-making procedure, planning, and evaluation in order to ensure the project's continuation and, as a result, the accumulation of its long-term benefits (Dalhatu et al., 2015; Olutayo & Ajani, 2021). A community-driven or bottom-up approach to development is predicated on local participation in and accountability for development community planning, implementation, and monitoring. Therefore, the bottom-up method guarantees that all members of the community are involved in sustainable development activities, and that the people place a higher value on the development intervention, which has a multiplicative impact on the initiative's long-term viability. Both governments and aid organisations now often use the Community-Driven Development (CDD) concept (Alarape & Adegoke, 2021). It is possible to define sustainability as the continuing of project advantages beyond the project term, the continuation of local activity that was spurred by the project, and the production of successor services and initiatives as a consequence of project-built local capacity (Bodo & Ukpong, 2018). The government and the people of a community both have an obligation to ensure that the community grows and thrives in a way that is both sustainable and long-lasting. When compared to pre-modern cultures when need for social amenities were minimal, the preferences and wants of contemporary community members are much too nuanced and complicated to be placed solely in the hands of the government (Poncian & Jose, 2019). Involvement of community members in development concerns has been shown to reduce waste of community resources and the delivery of services that are counterproductive to the people's social well-being (Olajuyigbe, 2016). In contrast to a dictatorship, a democratic government allows its people to have a voice in development choices and procedures from which they stand to gain the most (Adesida & Okunlola, 2015; Iyanda & Akinyemi, 2017).

Community participation in development not only ensures the long-term viability of social infrastructure like hospitals, clinics, water mains, power lines, drivable streets, and quality public schools. By fostering a feeling of community among its members, this mechanism encourages individuals to invest in the well-being of their neighbours (Digun-Aweto et al., 2019; Eyisi et al., 2020; Maiyaki et al., 2018). Across the board, research shows that nations like the United States, the United Kingdom, and Brazil are undergoing progressive growth that is inclusive and hence advantageous for a wide range of people (Arisukwu et al., 2020; Brown & Chikagbum, 2017). However, it has been found that community engagement in matters linked to development in local areas is low across Africa, particularly in Nigeria. This is because, over the last several years, Nigeria has enjoyed an oil boom that has allowed the nation to create over trillions of Naira each month, money that is then used to improve the lives of all of its citizens. The government has not been able to match her riches in the areas of providing basic amenities and infrastructures including decent roads, power, educational institutions, clean water, and appropriate health care (Arisukwu et al., 2020; Nishimura, 2017). Studies imply that now that the oil boom is gone, including locals in the planning, community, and

monitoring of development programmes can assist reposition Nigeria on the development stage.

## 2.0 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Up until very recently, the majority of communities in Nigeria held the view that it was the government and the agencies under its control alone that was responsible for meeting the requirements of the communities. However, the severity of the infrastructural problems communities face varies widely. It is disquieting to see that the state administration hasn't documented any evaluation of how community participation has impacted sustainable development programmes. Given this context, the researcher sought to carry out a study on the impact of optimum community involvement approach on sustainable development in southwest Nigeria.

**Objective:** The central focus of this study is to examine the impact of optimum community involvement on sustainable development in southwest Nigeria.

**Research Hypotheses (Ho):** Optimum community involvement as a strategy has no significant relationship with sustainable development in southwest Nigeria.

## 2.1 Concept of Optimum Community

The term "optimum community" refers to the process through which residents of a certain area work together, via community engagement, to bring the area to its highest potential for sustainable growth. An optimum community is a clearly defined community of individuals who are able to collectively foster and nurture growth. In order to achieve optimum community, its members must work in tandem with development agencies such as Community based organisations to implement sustainable-term plans for community improvement, and the government must provide its community for this to happen. The optimum component of an optimum community is sustainable development, and for a community to achieve this community, all of its future community must be sustainable.

## 2.2 Concept of Community Involvement

As a concept, community involvement may be hard to define and much more difficult to measure. An individual's level of involvement in a project is measured by how well they grasp its purpose, how much they feel invested in it, how much they are willing to contribute to its execution and its eventual outcome, and how hard they work to see it through to fruition (Reynolds & Sariola, 2018). In another dimension, community development is not real until there is individual's participation. Participation therefore embraces the initiators, supporters and the beneficiaries of any given development program. Participation means open, popular and broad involvement of the people of the community in decisions that affect their lives (Fakere & Ayoola, 2018). Community development of a society to become an optimum community varies based on the type of community, a rural community will need rural development to be an optimum community while an urban community needs an urban development to be an optimum development. Examples of community engagement include in-kind and monetary gifts, employee volunteer days, long-term nonprofit collaborations, and

other forms of participation. There has never been a time when the commercial argument for corporate community participation was more compelling (Yahaya, 2021).

## 2.3 Concept of Sustainable Development

The definition of sustainable development is now one of the most-quoted definitions in the literature (Klarin, 2018). At its core, sustainable development is an approach to economic and social development that prioritizes resource conservation without sacrificing human well-being. When the needs of the present are met without compromising the capacity of future generations to meet their own needs, we have achieved sustainable development. Sustainable development is founded on the ideas of development (socioeconomic development within social constraints), requirements (equitable redistribution of resources), and future generations (the potential for long-term use to guarantee future generations a decent standard of living). Conservation of natural resources and a development to future generations are at the heart of sustainable development. It's the mechanism for continuing ongoing operations while conserving available resources (Reynolds & Sariola, 2018). If we take into account that "sustainable development" is defined as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (David-Chavez & Gavin, 2018), then we can deduce that "sustainable equity" is the capacity to meet the compulsions of equity both within and across human generations. It's development that caters to both current and future generations.

## 3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study entitled Sustainable Ethical Tourism (SET) and Rural Community Involvement examines how rural community involvement can promote sustainable ethical tourism. An exhaustive literature search was conducted for this study, drawing on a wide range of published works on the literature of rural tourism, including popular magazines, websites, academic peer-reviewed journals, and other related scientific publications. This research was based on an interpretivistic epistemology. The researcher provides background information, an overview, and a critique of the issue at hand. According to the findings, efforts to include more locals in rural tourism have mostly failed and might need some fine-tuning to benefit a wider variety of parties (Nicolaidis, 2020). Given that this research only looks at one facet of sustainable development—the tourist industry—there is certain to be some gaps. This amounts to prioritizing the Sustainable development target of maintaining a stable environmental state. This has serious repercussions for the other 16 sustainable development objectives.

The book, *Community Involvement in Health: From Passive Recipients to Active Participants*, is broken into three sections. The first part examines community health engagement's context. There are chapters on the history of community engagement and community health engagement. The book concentrates on the UK, but it also examines the global situation. Next chapters give a detailed examination of current policies and practises. The first part analyses why community involvement is important and the benefits to local citizens, communities, the NHS, and bigger social welfare organizations (Webster & Smithies, 2018). The research has limitations due to the fact that it is a demographic analysis of volunteering in the United Kingdom. The results cannot be applied to the Nigerian environment. Another paper looks at

the ways in which ecotourism benefits sustainable communities. The poll asked residents of six Taiwanese villages on tourism's economic, socio-cultural, environmental, and life satisfaction sustainability. 849 surveys were collected. The analytical results shed insight on the long-term sustainability of nature-based tourism, showing that economic, socio-cultural, and environmental viability changed throughout the consolidation, development, and engagement stages of development. Pre- and post-development perspectives of tourism sustainability yielded radically different results for the four pillars of sustainability. The study shows that residents' attitudes vary with time, therefore managers should assess growth opportunities and use acceptable techniques (Lee & Jan, 2019). The research is deficient since it focuses only on the tourism sector of sustainable development. This is akin to focusing on the Sustainable Development Goal of stable environmental conditions. This undermines the other 16 sustainable development goals.

In a study entitled *Enhancing community participation in tourism planning associated with protected areas in developing countries: Lessons from Malawi*, This research examines ways to increase community engagement in tourist planning for protected areas in developing nations. In-depth interviews and focus groups were used to compile the data. Participants included residents of the two protected areas, as well as representatives from protected area management organisations, government agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), tour operators, and the general public. What this study shows is that tourist planners in underdeveloped countries need to rethink how they include locals living near protected areas. The research is lacking since it only looks at one nation (Malawi), which has a very different culture from Nigeria. The fact that it is primarily concerned with tourist planning is also a weakness.

In yet another study entitled *Community-driven Development Strategy for Sustainable Infrastructure*, The purpose of the research is to identify effective strategies for incorporating Nigeria's border communities into the country's economic development as a whole. Four border villages along Cameroon's border with Nigeria were selected using a purposeful sampling technique. Forty heads of household were selected at random from the communities investigated, and each was given a questionnaire. Distinct types of statistical analysis, including descriptive and inferential, were applied to the data. The study found that basic infrastructure and services were severely lacking in the area under examination, even after accounting for the government's current infrastructure intervention programme. The research also showed that local residents want a say in the planning and construction of infrastructure projects in their neighbourhoods, which is not the case at the moment. However, the research is incomplete since it focuses only on the population in border communities close to the Cameroon border, while the Southwest states of Nigeria do not have a border with Cameroon.

In yet another study entitled, *Community Participation in Sustainable Rural Infrastructural Development in Riyom Area, Plateau State of Nigeria*, The study focuses on the Riyom Local Government Area of Plateau State, Nigeria, and looks at how locals may work together to build long-lasting infrastructure in rural areas. Geographical differences in infrastructure density, community involvement, financial support for maintenance, and difficulties encountered by groups working together on infrastructure were studied. Sustainable rural infrastructure in the

Riyom LGA of Plateau State, Nigeria is the focus of this involvement community. It looked at discrepancies in infrastructure provision between regions, as well as variations in community involvement and financial support for maintenance. A lack of engagement is shown by the findings, which point to communication between members of the community being limited to information collecting and brief dialogue. There are now local security guards, a centralised maintenance committee, and enough money to repair or replace damaged infrastructure. Although Nigeria is the focus of this study's demographics, only residents of Riyom Area, Plateau State of Nigeria are profiled; nevertheless, the Southwest states of Nigeria are not represented in Riyom Area, Plateau State of Nigeria.

### 3.1 Social Capital Theory

The theory of social capital posits that social relationships have the potential to serve as a source of capital for individuals. Success in school and the acquisition of highly sought-after and financially rewarded skills and certifications may, for instance, benefit from a secure family life. Social capital, as defined by evolutionary biologists, is "any element of social interaction that confers a reproductive benefit." Social capital denotes the advantageous qualities of social interaction. However, it is not a true kind of capital, and it is well understood that social capital may have both positive and negative effects. Therefore, it's an incorrect and unclear choice of term. While some sociologists may dispute with the inclusion of capital with social economists may object to the inclusion of social alongside capital (Claridge, 2018). Benefits of community initiatives to increase social capital include the possibility of improving the health of both the intended beneficiaries and those who are closely connected to them. Intriguing new research highlights the potential roles of social capital in the process of climate change adaptation in the agriculture sector by documenting the correlation between community involvement and a high level of social capital, such as trust, community engagement, and personal relationships with individuals from neighbouring communities (Wu et al., 2020). In spite of the fact that individuals may achieve their goals independently of their social networks, social capital theory argues that these networks can provide valuable assets that can be used for success. It is not only the people a person knows but also what others in their social network know that is crucial (Bae & Sohn, 2018). The notion of social capital posits that taking part in groups and events together boosts people's social capital. Increasing levels of social capital lead to a larger nonprofit sector. The phrase "social capital" is used to describe the sum of benefits that an individual or group receives as a consequence of their extensive web of more or less formalized mutual acquaintance and recognition links (Grover et al., 2019).

### 4.0 RESEARCH DESIGN

A descriptive survey design was used for this study. Questionnaires were used to elicit responses from the participants of this study who are dwellers in the selected areas of southwest Nigeria.

#### 4.1 Population of the Study

The target population of this study comprises all people in the selected community in each state in the Southwest Nigeria. The study was conducted among the selected communities in

Southwest Nigeria. The South-West geopolitical zone of Nigeria is made up of six (6) states, namely, Ondo, Osun, Oyo, Ekiti, Lagos and Ogun States with one hundred and thirty-seven (137) Local Government Areas (LGAs). Ondo state has eighteen (18) LGAs, Osun state with thirty (30) LGAs, Oyo has thirty-three (33) LGAs, Ekiti state with sixteen (16) LGAs, Lagos state with twenty (20) LGAs and Ogun state with twenty (20) LGAs respectively. The population of the entire region according to the NBS 2020 population estimated figure is about thirty-eight (38) million people. However, the study randomly selected one community each from each of the three senatorial districts in a state. 100 people were selected from each of the community in the senatorial district

**Table: 1.0 Name of States in the Southwest and Community in Senatorial Districts**

S/N	State in Southwest	Communities in Senatorial Districts
1	Osun	Ejigbo
		Okuku
		Ifetedo
2	Oyo	Ogbomoso
		Ibadan
		Igbo ora
3	Lagos	Agege
		Iworo
		Yaba
4	Ekiti	Ado Ekiti
		Oye Ekiti
		Ise-Orun
5	Ogun	Ifo
		Ijebu ode
		Imeko
6	Ondo	Okitipupa
		Ile-olujioke/igbo
		Owo

**Source:** Researcher's field work (2022)

## 4.2 Sample and Sampling Technique

In order to get a good representative's sample size, the sampling technique used for this is simple random sampling. This method implies that every member of community has an equal chance of being selected into the sample. 100 people living in the selected communities in each state in the south west were selected randomly for the study making a total of 1800. The study adopted convenience approach to get 50% of the population as the sample size. Therefore, the sample size for the study is 900.

## 4.3 Presentation of Data

**Table 2.0: Influence of Community involvement on sustainable development**

S/N		SA (%)	A (%)	DA (%)	SDA (%)	NS (%)	Mean	Std. Dev
1.	Community involvement has helped reduce the rate of poverty in Southwest Nigeria.	226 (29.1%)	412 (53.1%)	44 (5.7%)	80 (10.3%)	14 (1.8%)	4.84	.784
2.	Community involvement has helped to ensure gender equality in Southwest Nigeria.	228 (29.4%)	430 (55.4%)	16 (2.1%)	86 (11.1%)	16 (2.1%)	4.96	.901
3.	Community involvement has helped achieve clean water and sanitation in Southwest Nigeria.	354 (45.6%)	338 (43.6%)	18 (2.3%)	56 (7.2%)	10 (1.3%)	4.98	1.11
4.	Community involvement has helped promote good health and well-being in Southwest Nigeria.	272 (35.1%)	426 (54.9%)	12 (1.5%)	54 (7.0%)	12 (1.5%)	4.99	.929
5.	Community involvement has helped to Fast rack economic growth in Southwest Nigeria.	304 (39.2%)	304 (39.2%)	90 (11.6%)	52 (6.7%)	26 (3.4%)	4.63	.670
6.	Community involvement has helped foster peace, justice, and strong institutions in Southwest Nigeria.	228 (29.4%)	454 (58.5%)	32 (4.1%)	62 (8.0%)	-	4.876	.722
7.	Community involvement strategy has made Southwest Nigeria witness growth in the industry, innovation, and infrastructure.	226 (34.3%)	442 (57.0%)	14 (1.8%)	40 (5.2%)	14 (1.8%)	4.80	.767
8.	The community involvement strategy has ensured inclusiveness and access to equitable education in Southwest Nigeria.	246 (31.7%)	360 (46.4%)	28 (3.6%)	118 (15.2%)	24 (3.1%)	4.00	.944



**N=776, Weighed Average mean = 4.76**

**Source:** Researcher's Field work, 2022

Findings show that 29.1%, 53.1%, respondents representing 82.2% agreed that regular community involvement has helped reduce the rate of poverty in Southwest Nigeria, while 16% disagreed. Furthermore, it reveals that 29.4%, 55.4%, respondents representing 84.8% agree that community involvement has helped ensure gender equality in Southwest Nigeria, while 13.2% disagreed. Moreover, it reveals that 45.6%, 43.6%, respondents representing 89.2% agree that community involvement has helped achieve clean water and sanitation in Southwest Nigeria, while 9.5% disagreed. In addition, it showed that 35.1%, 54.9%, respondents representing 90.0% agreed that community involvement has helped promote good health and well-being in Southwest Nigeria, while 8.5% disagreed. Likewise, it reveals that 39.2%, 39.2%, respondents representing 78.4% agree that community involvement has helped Fast rack economic growth in Southwest Nigeria, while 18.3% disagreed. Furthermore, it reveals that 29.4%, 58.5%, respondents representing 87.9% agree that community involvement has helped foster peace, justice, and strong institutions in Southwest Nigeria, while 12.1% disagreed. Additionally, it reveals that 34.3%, 57.0%, respondents representing 91.4% agree that the community involvement strategy has made Southwest Nigeria witness growth in the industry, innovation, and infrastructure, while 7.0% disagreed. Lastly, 31.7%, 46.4%, respondents representing 78.1% agree that the community involvement strategy has ensured inclusiveness and access to equitable education in Southwest Nigeria, while 18.8% disagreed.

#### 4.4 Test of Hypothesis

**H01:** optimum community involvement as a strategy has no significant relationship with sustainable development in Southwest Nigeria.

**Table 3.0: Correlation between community involvement and sustainable development in Southwest Nigeria.**

Items		community involvement	Sustainable development
community involvement	Pearson Correlation	1	.921**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	776	776
Sustainable development	Pearson Correlation	.921**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	776	776
	Mean	1.8479	.42316
	Std. Deviation	1.7897	.30321

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

**Sources:** Source: Researcher's Field work, 2022

The correlation above shows a significant relationship between community involvement and Sustainable development in South-west Nigeria. Furthermore, the relationship between community development and sustainable development is high, positive, and significant ( $r = 0.921$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Therefore, the result shows that community involvement as a strategy has a significant positive relationship with sustainable development in Southwest Nigeria, hence the null hypothesis is rejected.

## 5.0 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study examined the effect of community development on sustainable development in southwest Nigeria. During the survey, nine hundred (900) copies of the questionnaires were administered to the study respondents across the six geo-political zone in the southwest. Seven hundred and seventy-six (776) were returned filled and valid for analysis, making an 86.22% response rate possible. Hence the analysis was based on the seven hundred and seventy-six (776) copies of questionnaires that were retrieved fully completed and valid for the study on optimum community involvement as a strategy for sustainable development in Southwest Nigeria. Pearson Moment Correlation (PMC) analysis was used to test the hypothesized relationships, followed by interpretations and discussions.

The overall findings established that the community was actively involved in sustainable development in southwest Nigeria. These findings urged that by involving the community in the different project phases, the community ensures the success of a project through collective responsibility in terms of resource control (Ako & Ojo, 2019). The lack of this involvement will lead to a lack of sustainable development. It was further stated by Umoh & Lugga, (2018) that authentic community participation in the different project phases enhances the sustainability of the community projects. He added that this could only be achieved through people-centered development. Project sustainability positively impacted the community's well-being regarding improved living standards, increased business opportunities, and increased income levels. According to Id et al., (2021), a project is considered sustainable in the short term when the project activities and benefits continue at least 3 years after the project's life. For sustainability to be realized, the community must play a role (Olutayo & Ajani, 2021). People themselves should define sustainable development, which is achievable through project requests. The community was supposed to be brought into focus through active participation and collective decision-making.

It is imperative to state that participatory communication has a major role in developing rural communities and helps development agencies achieve their purpose. Most of the development that has not been achieved has been attributed to the non-use of participatory communication (Olutayo & Ajani, 2021). The effectiveness of participatory communication has helped the target audience or the benefiting communities as they were seen as the drive for social change rather than viewing them as passive beneficiaries of development. Community involvement has helped to sensitize and enlighten beneficiaries on the need to participate actively during the time and before the project is executed. It also helps achieve sustainable development as the people are briefed on managing the project (Dalhatu et al., 2015). This is why the Community

involvement component should be adopted at every level of project execution since the respondents have expressed their opinion that it is a veritable tool that enhances development/community projects. It is worthy to note that project ineffectiveness is attributed to the non-applicability of community involvement. Therefore, development agencies should know the importance of participatory communication when carrying out development/community projects (Alarape & Adegoke, 2021; Olutayo & Ajani, 2021).

## 6.0 CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, a correlation between optimum community involvement and sustainable development has been established. It also demonstrates that optimum community involvement strategy influences educational development and delivery of primary health care in Southwest Nigeria. Also, economic development will be enhanced by optimum community involvement and crime rate. Finally, optimum community involvement enhances the economic development of southwest Nigeria.

This is why the component of optimum community involvement should be adopted at every level of project execution since the respondents have expressed their opinion that it is a veritable tool that enhances development/community projects. Furthermore, it is worth noting that development ineffectiveness is attributed to the non-applicability of optimum community involvement. Therefore, development agencies should know the importance of community involvement when carrying out development/community projects.

## 7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were proposed:

1. Participatory communication should be adopted across every level of development projects as it helps development agents engage the people to know their pressing needs and avoid situations where projects worth millions of naira are not utilized by the beneficiaries.
2. Community involvement/participation should be given priority as it has been perceived to be sacrosanct when carrying out development projects.
3. Development agencies should devise new communication strategies that suit the rural dwellers who do not understand English, such as the use of interpreters during community engagement.

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