

# **Assessment of the Role of Women Participation in Community Development in Benin Metropolis**

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## **Abstract**

This paper investigated the role of women participation in community development in Benin Metropolis. A simple survey research design was employed to explore the issue. A 15 item questionnaire supplemented with oral interview sessions provided the data used for the study. The study involved 100 randomly selected women in Benin metropolis. The sample was drawn from across four communities within Benin metropolis. The data collected were analyzed using mean score, frequency count and simple percentages. The findings of the study showed that women are not aware of the various community development programmes going on in their community, women do not receive adequate information and mobilization in community development programmes, women are not part of the decision making, and implementation of the community development programmes and women are not coordinated in coming together to discuss their developmental needs. Based on the findings, recommendations were also proffered.

**Keywords:** Participation, Community, Development, Metropolis

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## **Introduction**

Participation is a common place in community development. Participation cannot be analyzed without having the concept of community development. The concept community development is not a new idea. It has been in existence for long and it has been a mechanism and technique developed and employed by the people to identify their felt needs.

This can be identification of facilities, programmes and leadership towards improving the entire community. Such needs may be building of schools, boreholes, markets, post office, town hall, police station, skill acquisition centers etc. This involves planning, decision making, participation, fund-raising and executing the chosen projects.

Community development is a broad based activity that tends to embrace almost all the development activities of man. Community development is geared simply towards material and non-material goals. The material aspects of community development is in the area of: Construction of roads, Bridges covets or the building of classroom blocks, community centers, water schemes, market stores among a host of others.

The non-materials aspect of community development is geared towards the building of minds of men. The building of the minds of men is done when we become concerned with the inculcation of knowledge skills and attitudes necessary for understanding social changes and more importantly dealing with the same. Community development stresses the idea of community service and effort. It is popular movements which seek to stimulate the people's desire to know, to think and to act. It helps to motivate and assist people to live healthier, happier, satisfying and more interesting life. Hence, it is often seen as a crusade against ignorance, poverty, disease, harmful and outwitted customs, social segregation, personal boredom among the people irrespective of age, sex, their health and welfare, understanding the machinery of government, cultural and social awareness and development of their economic and commercial organization.

In essence, community development centers on man, his insight, attitude, skills, knowledge, aptitude and appreciations of the techniques of utilizing them for his own improvement and that of his community in particular and the society at large.

The overall aim of community development should be the improvement of persons either as individual or as a group and their living situation.

Community development entails seeking better conditions of living for people and their communities.

Community development is a social practice, because it involves efforts on the part of the community members to enhance or bring about changes in the living standard or conditions of the community to which they belong^ that means, changes from a situation to a better one. The idea has to be initiated by the people themselves and worked upon for their own interest. The effort is shown in the active participation of the people in the design of the project for their well-being and such participation may take the form of time, energy, financial and material resources put together for proper implementation of the project.

The resources needed for community development projects may involve some outside authority, government or non-governmental agencies and such resources have to be planned for and managed by the committee set aside to mind the affairs and execute the project.

Community development is viewed as a process, a method, a programme or a movement. It is a movement designed to promote better living for the whole community with the active participation and if possible, on the initiative of the community, but if this is not fort coming spontaneously, by the use of technique for arousing and stimulating it in order to secure its active enthusiastic response to the movement, (Oduran, 1994).

The reliance on the people's own initiatives and provision of technical and other resources/services in ways which encourages and assist initiatives self-help and self-reliance. This movement is to promote voluntary and involuntary participation of the people with efforts aimed at improving the economic, physical and social condition in their community.

Citizenship participation occur in community development when the change agent and members of the community share in the formulation and execution of proposals or plans and programmes designed to bring about improvement in the living situation of the community.

In other words, participation stipulates that the local people should take part in the planning, utilization and assessment of the social amenities or facilities designed for the improvement of their welfare. It is such participation that gives the people the pride of ownership of the facilities completed in the processes of community development.

The concept emphasizes the initiative of the people as a means of stimulating the active participation of all citizens in the work of community development.

Participation increase faith in common understanding. It enhances the possibility of success in the execution of programmes designed for better living in rural communities.

Participation has the advantage of increasing project efficiency, promoting projects effectiveness, helping to build the capacity of

beneficiaries as well as enhancing and empowering the members of the community. It can also promote confidence building and create a sense of belonging in the people. This is sometimes referred to as People Participation (PP). This element emphasizes the involvement of the community members in the activities that are designed to enhance the development of their community. The idea of citizenship participation is deeply rooted in the meaning of community development which enjoins that whatever is done to improve the welfare of a people must seek to elicit the enthusiasm and wholehearted involvement of such a people. This element implies that success is assured where the effort of a local community is aroused in the process of development. This idea portrays community development in its true light as a Cooperative Venture. According to Anyanwu (1992) citizen participation stipulates that the local people should be involved in the planning, execution, utilization and assessment of the activities designed to enhance their well-being.

Citizen participation however, implies much more than involvement (Oduaran, 1994).

It involves democracy and education. It is also based on the tested tradition of 'free enterprise' and 'the rights' of the community members. In the process of trying to effect a change in the well-being of community members, we should bear it in mind that the individual has inherent and legal right to humane treatment. We must therefore appeal to his conscience and free-will ability to solicit his support and participation are the primary ingredients of the free enterprise and democratic participation being stressed here.

The element of citizen participation emphasizes the initiative of the people as a means of stimulating the active participation of all citizens in the work of community development.

In many Nigerian communities especially in the rural setting, women are often considered as objects of pro-creation and are supposed to be seen but not heard. Their views and opinions are considered as non-relevance hence they are not encouraged to play an active role in the project of community development in their communities. However, women's involvement in development process is regarded as the only means through which they can show and display their potentials to effect significantly, the socio-economic and political well-being of their immediate environment as well as enhancing their standard of living. Women's participation in development activities is significant as it helps to accelerate development of rural communities. The participation of women in development of their communities can make such communities self-reliant and thus enhance the standard of living of the inhabitants.

The World Bank Report (1984) stated that nearly all development-oriented programmes have failed to reach out to most rural people. Even in towns and cities, the report continued that discontinuation rate is high because people fail to participate as expected. This situation can be traced to the failure of such programmes to fully integrate and mobilize women to enlist in them.

Oduaran (1991) states that women are power agents of development, development needs women as much as women need development. Women's role in ensuring success in development oriented programmes cannot therefore, be underestimated. Women are the hub of the homes in both rural and urban communities. They are mothers and builders of the home. They are the first teachers of children. Women mostly help to transmit the acceptable norms and values of the community to the younger generation and as such, they stand a better chance to be recognized and participate fully in the community development programmes.

When it comes to the scarcity of developmental structures and needs, women and children are the most vulnerable and so, their full integration into community developmental programmes cannot be overemphasized. It is based on this, that the women in Benin Metropolis join forces in identifying their felt-needs and the need to participate in the socio-economic programme initiatives in their community for better living. When women are integrated into community development programmes, it will make them to become aware of the need for change and this will encourage them to develop the right skills and attitude towards felt needs and how to go about initiating ways of solving these needs. There are many ways that community development programmes affect women because they are mostly the end users of these developmental programmes.

Participation involves utilizing available resources, time and energy of the people and the government (nongovernmental organization etc. Some problems emanating from participation in community development projects are: mobilization, funding, time and interest of the people, the complex nature of society and the various political policies in recent times which had added a new phase to the practice or community development.

However, mobilization and citizen participation is interwoven. In other hand, it is when people are mobilized and become aware of an ongoing community project that they can participate fully.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Women have been known to be very instrumental in the development of their various communities over the years. Women particularly in the home front have played very important role in ensuring the survival of the family and their immediate communities. Hence, the major issue of interest in this study is to investigate the role of women participation in community development.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The cardinal purpose of this study was to ascertain the role of women participation in community development in Benin metropolis. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Find out if women are fully involved in the development and implementation of community development programme.
2. Ascertain if community development programmes could succeed without women participation.
3. Investigate if the failure of community development programme be attributed to the non-involvement of women participation.
4. Determine how women could be actively involved or participate in development programme.

### **Research Questions**

In view of the purposes, the following questions were raised to guide the investigation.

1. Are women fully involved in development and implementation of community development programmes?
2. Can community development programs succeed without women participation?
3. Can failure of community development programme be attributed to the non-involvement of women participation?
4. How can women be actively involved or participate in community development programme.

## **Research Methodology**

The study adopted the descriptive survey research design to investigate the role of women participation in community development in Benin metropolis. This type of research design was chosen because it allows for the description of attributes in a situation at one or more points in time. According to Kelinger (1979), the method has the ability to provide accurate information on a whole population even when a reliable sample is used.

The study consisted of a total of 100 women's selected from four communities within Benin metropolis. Twenty-five (25) participants were selected from each of the four communities. The major instrument was the research questionnaire designed in the likert format of items design. The instrument titled: The role of women participation in community development Assessment questionnaire.

(RWPCDAG) four research assistants (one for each community) were used in administering the instrument. Participants were made to record their responses on a four-point continuum ranging from strongly agreed to strongly disagree, with a weighing of 4 to 1.

The data collected was analyzed using simple descriptive statistical technique and the cut-off point was determined by finding the mean score of 2.50 to the options. The instrument was validated using expert judgment approach before it was used.

## **Results**

The results that emerged from the investigation in relation to all the issues examined as stated in the research questions are presented in the table below.

The responses obtained on the issue were analyzed using simple percentage and the finding is presented in the table I.

Table 1  
Women involvement in community development programme

S/No	Items	No of		"Respondents		
		Yes	%	No	%	Total
1	Awareness of on-going community programme	28	28%	72	72%	100
2	Memberships of the committee	-	-	100	100%	100
3	Invitation to decision making	-	-	100	100%	100
4	Any information about the programme	18	18%	82	82%	100
5	Contributions towards the execution of the programme	30	30%	70	70%	100

The result presented in Table 1 show that 28 or 28 percent of those sampled agreed that there was awareness of an on-going community development programme in their community programme in their community while 72 or 72 per cent responded negatively. There is 100 per cent negative response on women not being members of community development programme committee. 100 per cent negative responses was also recorded that women were not part of the decision making. On information about the programme, 18per cent responded positively while 82 per cent indicated that they have no information about any community development programme in their community. On contribution towards the execution of the programmes, 30 per cent responded positively while 70 per cent gave negative indication.

Table 2  
Success of women development program without women participation

S/No	Items	No of Respondents				
		Yes	%	No	%	Total
1	Mobilization campaign for women to participate in community development programme	23	23%	77	77%	100
2	Coordination of the women towards community development	18	18%	82	82%	100
3	Are women participating in on-going community programme	20	20%	80	80%	100
4	Are they making any contribution towards the programme	17	17%	83	83%	100
5	Availability of women cooperative association	12	12%	88	88%	100



The results presented in Table 2 shows that 23 per cent out of 100 respondents indicated positively that there was mobilization campaign for women's participation while 77 percent out of 100 respondents indicated that there was no campaign for women mobilization. 18 respondents (18 percent) out of the 100 respondents indicated positively that there was coordination of the women while 82 respondents (82 percent) responded negatively that women are participating in an on-going community development programme while 80 respondents (80 percent) responded negatively (17 percent) responded positively that women are making contribution towards community development programme while 83 respondents (83 per cent) responded negatively. 12 respondents out of the 100 respondents (12 percent) indicated positively that there are women co-operative associations while 88 respondents (88 per cent) indicated negatively.

Table 3  
Failure of community development programme without women participation

S/No	Items	No of Respondent				Total
		Yes	%	No	%	
1	Women are members of cooperative association in their communities	20	20%	80	80%	100
2	Women come together to discuss their development needs	24	24%	76	76%	100
3	Women contested for elective position	14	14%	86	86%	100
4	Women non election in the last election	26	26%	74	74%	100
5	Women are integrated into community development programme	20	20%	80	80%	100

The result in Table 3 reveals that 20 percent out of the 100 respondents indicated positively that women are members of cooperative association while 80 percent indicated negatively. There was 24 percent positive response that women come together to discuss their developmental needs while 76 percent indicated negatively. 86 percent out of 100 respondents indicated negatively that women did not context elective position while 14 percent indicate positively. 26 percent of the 100 respondents indicated positively that women non-election in the last election in their community while 74 percent indicated negatively. 20 percent out of 100 respondents

indicated positively that women are integrated into community development programme while 80 percent indicated negatively.

Table 4  
Women participation in community development programme

S/No	Items	Weighted Mean	Mean Score	Remarks
1	Women should be part of decision making	520	3.46	Accepted
2	Change agent should work with women in community development programmes implementation	560	3.73	Accepted
3	Women group should be mobilized	580	3.86	Accepted
4	The needs of the women group should be integrated into community development programmes	500	3.33	Accepted
5	Skill acquisition centers should be provided in rural communities	560	3.73	Accepted

The data presented in Table 4 revealed that all the identified items were considered major items of women participation in community development programmes. All of the items met the criterion means score of 2.50. This implies that women can participate in community development programme through decision making, change agent, women group, the needs of the women group and skill acquisition centre.

### Discussion of Results

The results of this investigation have been quite revealing and instructive. The analysis of the data collected revealed that women participation and involvement in community development programmes was very minimal and most of the women are ignorant of the community development programmes going on in their communities. It was observed also that the women groups were not part of the planning and decision making in the development of community development programme.

This study also shows that women do not form part of the committee in the execution of community development programmes neither they are given the opportunity to participate in political and electoral activities in the community. It was also observed that women do not come together to discuss their common needs and proffer their own ideas, they are not integrated into the decision making body.

Finally, for women to have full participation in community development programmes, the change agent should coordinate, mobilize and integrate the women group into the implementation of community development programmes, information and skill acquisition programmes should be made available for the women in order for the women to be involved.

### **Conclusion/Recommendations**

The importance of community development programs requires that participating in development planning enriches the process. Women organizing abilities, women's voices and concerns in the community are equally important to community development and welfare as most women reflected need to initiate social, education, health and environmental projects. There is the need to facilitate and disseminate ideas of women participation in community development planning and decision making processes. This will help in examining and identifying mechanisms to enhance women's participation in community development planning and decision making processes. There is also the need to find ways to increase the number of women and to promote opportunities for women to participate as committee members in the community development committee.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. The government, non-governmental agencies, change agents as well as voluntary individuals or groups should involve women in participating in community development planning and decision-making processes.
2. Women should be stimulated and encouraged to take a more active role in community development, planning and implementation. Policy makers and planners in both government and non-governmental organizations should recognize the importance of women's role in community development planning and decision-making processes.

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