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Effect of socioeconomic characteristics of rural youths on their attitude towards participation in community development projects

A. O. Angba¹, O. M. Adesope^{2*} and C. L. Aboh¹

¹Department of Agricultural Economics and Extension, University of Calabar, Nigeria.

²Department of Agricultural Economics and Extension, University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

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The study evaluates the effect of socioeconomic characteristics of rural youths on their attitude towards participation in community development projects in Rivers State, Nigeria. Data were collected with the aid of structured questionnaire administered to 210 youths in 27 communities. A multi stage random sampling technique was employed in the selection and data analysis was by the use of Pearson correlation. Findings revealed that some relationship exist significantly between socio-demographic characteristics such as indigene of community, length of residence in community, gender, age, occupation, educational level and the attitude of youths towards community development projects. Based on the findings of the study it was recommended among others that in order to intensify participation in community development efforts of youths and by implication improve their attitude, government agencies, non-government agencies, researchers should identify relevant youths in the community through rural rapid appraisal approach and encourage them physically. Also, female youths should be encouraged to participate actively in physical development activities by giving them adequate recognition and attention so that they can have that sense of belonging to participate.

Key words: Rural youths, attitude, participation, community development projects.

INTRODUCTION

Youths make up a significant portion of the workforce in both rural and urban communities. They have assumed wider community development roles through formation of youth associations (Ogolo, 1996). Youths have been involved in development activities in one way or the other. These activities are expected to lead to community development.

The importance of the youths to national development is without doubt because the various programmes directed at them by government at various times gives credence to this (Agumagu et al., 2006). Youths generally need proper harnessing so that they can maintain reliable status quo in their locality. It is easier for them to speak with one voice when they are brought together. This is why mobilisation yields progress. The entirety of youths in both urban and rural areas needs to be mobilized for proper impact to be felt in their communities (Adesope,

2007). In a study by Ugwoke et al. (2005) it was reported that youths engaged in farming activities. Fasina and Okunola (2005) confirmed this by stating that youths are major clientele group needed for agricultural transformation in Nigeria. Thus the preparation of any nation for productive life depends on the policies and programmes designed for youths.

Rural-urban migration is a major problem facing Nigeria. The presence of important infrastructural facilities in rural communities helps to reduce the ever depleting farming population in rural communities in the country (Osuji, 1992). Participation helps youths in planning and acting together for the satisfaction of their felt needs through organized efforts to acquire skills and the concepts required for their effective participation in the problem solving process (Jibowo, 1992; Akinbile et al., 2006).

Goedkoop et al. (2004) stated that young people have a natural disposition for innovation and for learning new tools and those assets can help to create viable options to remain in the countryside. Youth participation in real

*Corresponding author. E-mail: omadesope@yahoo.co.uk.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents.

Characteristics	Response	Percentage
Length of residence	Above 20years	63.3
Indigene	Yes	89.0
Gender	Male	72.9
Age	20-30years	58.5
Occupation	Students	41.9
Educational level	Secondary	30.0

Table 2. Community development projects.

Projects	Ranking
General sanitation	1
Social events	2
Filling pot holes	3
Constructing bus stops	4
Vigilante groups	5
Constructing feeder roads	6
Renovating town halls	7
Erecting sign posts	8
Renovating and constructing market stalls	9

and concrete activities which include self help endeavours, environmental sanitation, renovation work has been reported (Adesope et al., 2007).

Since youths have been noted for their active involvement in community development, greater social propensity, faster reaction time, innovation proneness (Jibowo and Sotomi, 1996; Adesope, 2007), it becomes necessary to exploit their active features for progressive change in the community. The nature of the effect of socio-economic characteristics of youths on the way they feel about participating in community development projects is not clear. The study therefore investigates the effect of socioeconomic characteristics of rural youths on their attitude towards participation in community development projects

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in Rivers State. Rivers State is located between longitude 5 and 8°E and latitudes 4 and 6°E within the River Niger Delta on the West African Coast. The State is divided into 23 local government areas with Ijaws, Ikwerres and Ogonis as major ethnic groups who are mainly farmers. A long rainy season that lasts from April to October prevails in the State while the dry season lasts from November to March and is interrupted occasionally by sporadic rainfall.

Eight local government areas were selected for the study to include Gokana, Ahoada East, Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni, Ikwerre, Ahoada West, Obio/Akpor, Port Harcourt and Emohua. A multistage sampling technique was employed in the study. Out of the three agricultural zones two were selected. Four local governments were then selected and four communities were selected from the local

government areas. Thereafter, ten youths were selected; in all 27 communities were used for the study. A structured questionnaire was administered to 270 randomly selected respondents involved in the study. However data analysis was based on 210 useable questionnaires collected. Data collected were analysed using percentages and correlation matrix.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

From Table 1, about 63% of the respondents have resided in the host communities for more than 20 years. Also, 89% of the respondents are indigenes of their community of residence, and 72.9% were males. It was found that 58.5% of the respondents were aged between 20 and 30 years, 41.9% were students and 30% had secondary education.

Community development projects

Table 2 reveals that General sanitation was ranked first among the community development projects. This was followed by social events which ranked second. Filling pot holes ranked third, while constructing bus stops ranked fourth. Participation in vigilante groups ranked fifth while constructing feeder roads ranked sixth. Renovating town halls ranked seventh and erecting sign posts ranked eighth while renovating and constructing market stalls ranked ninth.

Correlation analysis

Table 3 shows the relationship between socioeconomic characteristics of rural youths and their attitude towards participation in community development projects in the study area from the results as shown on Table 3.

Length of residence correlates negatively and significantly with indigene of community. The implication of the relationship is that the longer the length of residence in the community the less favourable the attitude of rural youths towards participating in community development projects. This finding is expected since the study area is in the Niger Delta region, which has large deposits of crude oil that generates huge revenue for the nation yet experiences a major neglect in infrastructural development. As a result of the high expectations of the youths for compensation and development from the government and other stakeholders involved in exploration of oil in the region. These expectations most likely may have given room for negative effects on youths attitude towards participating in community development projects.

A non-indigene is less likely to participate fully in community development activities in a locality that is not his place of birth or where he has no lineage and obviously no commitment. However, an indigene of a community would better appreciate the conditions of his community

Table 3. Correlation matrix of relationship between socioeconomic characteristics of rural youths and their attitude towards participation in community development projects.

	LenRes	Indigene	Gender	Age	Occup.	Education	Attitude
Length Res	1.00						
Indigene	-0.49**	1.00					
Gender	-0.12	0.06	1.00				
Age	-0.03	-0.03	-0.26**	1.00			
Occup	0.02	-0.06	-0.07	.27**	1.00		
Education	0.02	-0.01	-0.09	0.21*	-0.21*	1.00	
Attitude	0.02	-0.03	0.00	0.10	0.01	0.08	1.00

*Coefficient significant at 0.01 level; **Coefficient significant at 0.001 level.

community because he has to contribute his quota to the development process. But this finding is not in congruence with this expectation. However, Ekong (2003) had opined that for a non-indigene to be fully accepted into rural social groups; the family he comes from must have lived in the community for a very long time, gained the acceptance of the people and contributed in various ways to the growth of the area. Nelson et al. (1960) noted that place of, and length of residence in community influences participation.

Gender correlates negatively and statistically with age, implying that gender has some effect on attitude towards participation. Male respondents who are physically stronger than the females seem to have less favourable attitude and this to a large extent will affect the participation.

Age of respondents affect their attitude towards participating in community development projects. This implies that it is more likely for younger youths to participate in community development activities than older youths. In essence the younger the individuals, the more arduous tasks they participate in and most likely the more favourable their attitude towards participation considering their greater strength. Also, the older the individual the less likely he is to participate fully in arduous and physical tasks. This finding supports Ekong (2003) and Nelson et al (1960).

Occupation correlates positively and significantly with age. The coefficient though low, suggests that occupation and age have some influence on respondents' attitude towards participating in community development projects. Though it may be difficult to state categorically that a particular occupation will influence youths attitude towards participating in community development projects, but from the findings of this study most respondents are secondary school and college students. It could then imply that since students are most likely working in groups, peer group influence may affect them in participating favourably in community development projects. This could be related to what Nelson et al. (1960) referred to as neighbourhoods. The implication of this finding is that students are more likely to have favourable atti-

tude towards participating in community development projects. This is possibly because they are socially inclined and more agile in that direction. Young individuals in groups are more receptive to change, can cooperate together in peers so that community development projects can be effectively carried out.

Educational level correlates significantly and positively with age. The implication of this finding is that as one attains a higher level of education attitude towards participating in community development projects is likely to be more favourable. But attitudinal level may vary however. In essence the higher the educational level attained the more favourable the attitude towards participating in community development projects. Ovwigho and Ifie (2004) reiterated the importance of education when they noted youths involvement in cooperative endeavours. Also, Onweagba (1990) in a study found that education was linked to attitude towards participation. Similarly, Ekong (2003) reported that age is more often used as a tenable criterion for some social status than education. According to Nelson et al (1960) educational levels are highly significant in the extent, intensity and pattern of participation. They further stated that participation increases with education, but beyond the high school level the increase is greatest in nonchurch-related organizations. It was further expressed that effective participation obviously requires communicative and human relational skills which must be learned; hence those who are better educated would be better empowered for participation because their attitude would likely be favourable. Asiabaka (1990) found that educated women participated more in the rural development programme of government (Better Life Programme). Education is a major determinant of effective participation in community development projects. The educated youth would most likely appreciate community development better than the less educated. If the youth appreciates community development his attitude towards participating in community development projects is likely to be favourable. Onu (1990) had reported the importance of education among rural development agents. The youths are potent agents in development in many rural and urban communities.

Occupation correlated negatively but significantly with educational level. This finding further shows that occupation and educational level influence youths' attitude towards participating in community development projects. However, Onweagba (1990) found that occupation did not influence individual behaviour in rural development activities. Though considered critically, occupation may not be a very serious determinant of participation in community development projects because according to Nelson et al (1960) there is less differentiation by occupation. It is therefore concluded that the rates of participation are less uniform among occupation types but the types of association is uniform. The present study presents interesting finding because the negative correlation may imply that less professional or less specialized occupations will likely be associated with more favourable attitude towards participating in community development projects. It could be why more students are likely to participate community development projects. They have more time and more socially inclined and are equally more receptive to change than older people (Saville, 1965). Jibowo and Sotomi (1996) in their study found that statistically significant relationship existed between age, level of formal education, occupation and participation in youth programmes.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The correlation analysis revealed that some relationship exist significantly between socio-demographic characteristics such as indigene of community, length of residence in community, gender, age, occupation, educational level and the attitude of youths towards community development projects. Based on the findings of the study it was recommended that in order to intensify participation in community development efforts of youths and by implication improve their attitude, government agencies, non-government agencies, researchers should identify relevant youths in the community through rural rapid appraisal approach. This should help to provide a data bank to ensure that adequate information on types of community development activities carried out by youths are easily obtained. Also, female youths should be encouraged to participate actively in physical development activities by giving them adequate recognition and attention so that they can have that sense of belonging to participate. More training and scholarship programmes in adaptive skills should be provided to further enhance the attitude of youths towards community development.

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