

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND OLDER ADULTS' SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITY-DRIVEN DEVELOPMENT: A STUDY OF ORON AND UDUNG UKO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS IN AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study assessed the relationship between civic engagement and older adults' support for community-driven development. The specific research purposes were: To demonstrate how civic engagement through involvement in decision making at village committee relates with older adults' support for community-driven development, to examine whether civic engagement through mobilization of information resource relates to older adults' support for community-driven development, to determine whether civic engagement through building social capital by consulting relates to older adults' support for community-driven development and finally, to disseminate research findings to the widest possible audience of policy makers, non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and academics. It was hypothesized that involvement in village committee decision making process, mobilization of information resource and building social capital by consulting do not significantly relate with older adults' support for community-driven development.

The study addressed gaps in the current literature about civic engagement and community development implications for older adults. The importance laid in expanding the understanding of civic engagement and the potential of the aged participating in community life and bringing life experience to civic life. The research methodology was a case study analysis with survey design. Primary data were obtained from structured interviews conducted with 160 older adults from 10 villages in the study area. Key findings of the study revealed that civic engagement by older adults helps to tap their energies and resources within the community. It was concluded that civic engagement has a positive impact on older

adults' support for community-driven development. The implication is that civic engagement is an important instrument for grassroots sustained development.

Keywords: *Civic, development, adults*

1. Introduction

Elderly adult population is increasing in all countries of the world. This is due to several factors which include decline in fertility, improvement in public health and increase in life expectancy. The population aged 55 years and above is increasing by 2.2 percent per year; and the number of persons aged 65 years and over, is rising by 2.8 percent annually (Abidemi, 2005). The great majority (two-thirds) of those over 60 years of age live in the developing world and that the proportion is increasing steadily and will reach nearly three-quarters by the year 2030 (Sylvia, 2000) cited in Abidemi (2005). One of the major interests of older adults in Sub-Saharan Africa is their penchant to support community development. Such support enhances the capacity of the community for a better living standard.

Community-driven development allows beneficiaries including older adults to be involved in the project design, management and accountability at the grassroots level. This means that such development measure consider the felt needs of the community including the older adults. It helps to increase older adults access to better life (improve welfare) and the freedom to choose by enlarging their range of choice available. Older adults are not passive recipients of the benefits of development. By being involved they add value to their community lives and create conditions conducive to growth of their self-esteem and institutions which promote human dignity and respect. Thus, it is possible for them to make inputs in key project decisions including management of investment funds. This has the tendency to improve the quality of development projects and strengthen community ownership. Older adults support for local project has the potential to create opportunity for balanced social and economic development (Asiyanbola, 2004).

However, observation in a number of rural areas revealed that older adults are losing faith in community driven development and policy planning. This implies that development planning at the community level is not socially inclusive. The experience of older adults today has been that of their complete severance from the process of local development (Okoye, 2004). This is a negation of UN (2008) that governance in the public interest cannot be realized without the participation of all citizens. Citizens must be active participants in policy planning if their rights are to be realized.

The continued failure of older adults to participate in community-driven development is unhealthy for the overall growth and development of the rural economy. In the community, they live in deplorable conditions and there are no institutional provisions for them. Since their involvement in rural projects has reduced, their quality of life is negatively affected. Development measures in the community do not take into consideration the needs of older adult since they have no control over key project decisions. The consequences of this poor support of community-driven projects are socio economic disempowerment and non strengthening of community governance. This means that the subsequent development

priorities are not elicited directly from all expected target beneficiaries. This has made them become vulnerable in the community as indicated by their lack of the capacity to protect themselves or articulate their voice and concerns (Pollert and Charlwood, 2009).

Making community-driven development more socially inclusive by involving older adults has become an urgent community imperative. This issue has attracted the attention of rural sociologists. It is possible that through civic engagement older adults have been able to support community-driven development. Civic engagement increases understanding of how individuals who have chosen to age in a place remain an integral part of the neighbourhood and continue to play an active role in neighbourhood life. This may result from long-term informal and formal community participation established through social networks and connections. The research examined civic engagement by older adult in aspects of grassroots political participation, social network established through membership in association and volunteering.

2. Hypotheses

1. Grassroot political participation has no significant relationship with older adults support for community-driven development.
2. Social network establishment through formal membership in association has no significant relationship with older adults support for community-driven development.
3. Volunteering does not significantly relate with older adults support for community-driven development.

3. Literature review and conceptual framework

3.1 Civic engagement and older adults support for community- driven development

Civic engagement is the drawing in of citizens and particularly disadvantaged groups to the governance of public institutions (UN, 2008). It is the idea that people matter in modern democracies. Civic or community engagement is essential to how budgets are decided, policy is developed and public services delivered. Significantly, civic engagement is crucial in developing policy for sustained economic and social development (UN, 2008). The need to widen democratic participation is based on the fact that groups vulnerable to deprivation also tend to be excluded from decision making. Governance in the public interest cannot be realized without the participation of all citizens. Citizens must be active participants in policy planning if their rights are to be realized. Civic engagement is divided into three categories: civic, electoral and political voice (Keeter, Zukin, Molly and Jenkins, 2002). The civic category deals with community problem solving, regular volunteering for a non electoral organization, active membership in a group or association, participation in fund raising run/walk/ride; other fund raising charity, run for political office and symbolic non participation.

Civic engagement is a community builder. A number of studies suggest that older adults are becoming involved in community-driven development projects (Keeter et al,

Prentice and Robinson. Wikipedia (2013) stated that when civic engagement is done properly, it builds the community and the participation within the local side of government. Civic engagement and community work is basically a side by side concurrence that together can help each other facilitate community transformation and help start off with a strong foundation for the role of governments.

Civic engagement offers the older adults the platform to be involved in community development. Such engagement has potential benefits such as achieving greater buy-in to decisions with fewer backlashes such as lawsuits, council recall etc; engendering trust between older adults and community which improves public behaviour at council meetings, developing better and more creative ideas and solutions; implementing ideas, programmes and policies faster and more easily; creating involved citizens instead of demanding customers etc (Wikipedia, 2013). Civic engagement enhances community development by making a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community through both political and non political process (Ehrlich, 2000).

The link between civic engagement and older adults support for community driven development has been acknowledged by scholars in rural sociology. The older adults do not exist in isolation from the community in which they are located. Instead, they carry a unique obligation to listen, understand and contribute to social transformation and development in communities (Ehrlich, 2000). Older adults as morally and civically responsible individuals recognize themselves as members of a larger social fabric and therefore consider social problems to be at least partly their own. Based on this, they are willing to see the moral and civic dimensions of issues, to make and justify informed moral and civic judgements, to take action when appropriate and to participate in community driven developments.

Community driven development builds on the coping mechanisms of the poor rural dwellers and take into account the cultural and social factors that influence these mechanisms; it enhances the ability of the poor to help themselves on a sustained basis through capacity building, empowers the poor by increasing their participation at village level, and raises the living standard of the poor by delivering programmes that are targeted (Jackson, 2004). The support by the older adults has been impelled by the shift in the conceptualization of community development from economics dominated to a more people centered approach. Older adults do not want to perceive their position in the community as disadvantaged. They feel obligated to contribute towards efforts to improve the standard of living and quality of life of their community. This human-centered community development concept promoted by older adults, has the potential to foster human dignity, greater equality, change in behaviour, enhanced human capacity as well as the wellbeing of the people inclusive of older adults (Jackson, 2004).

3.1 Grassroot political participation and older adults support for community-driven development

Mansuri (2004) found from his study that the potential gains from older people support for community-driven development through political participation are significant. It has the explicit objective of reversing power relations in a manner that creates energy and voice for older adult and other poor people by allowing them to have some control over development assistance. This could have the advantage of making development funds more responsive to their needs, improve the targeting of development projects, make government more responsive, improve the delivery of community goods and services and strengthen the capacities of the rural dwellers to undertake self-initiated development activities.

Civic engagement of neighbourhood residents may be viewed as the glue that binds together a community over a long period of time. Civic involvement of older adults can influence the development and redevelopment of both rural and urban communities (Davis, 1991). Community political action by older adults can move political outcomes affecting land use, decisions and other project development decisions. Rowles and Ravdal (2002) argued that older, long time residents in most rural communities have sometimes mobilize themselves for common action politically, economically and socially. Older, they develop personal identities that have become linked to their communities and as these long time residents retire, they seek out meaningful activities to continue to be productive contributors by supporting community-based projects in their neighbourhood. Longino and Colleagues (2002) stressed that older adults are integral to family life, participate in community life and bring collective life experiences and wisdom to civic life. Equally, they participate in grassroot political activities such as exercising their franchise, registering in political parties and playing active roles in political campaigns as indicative of their interest in governance for development purpose.

Ekuerhare (2002) argued that when older adults participate in community-driven development decisions they are likely to see the projects as their own, to utilize it maximally, defend and maintain it than when imposed on the community by government officials. Civic engagement helps to promote the use of local resources and the styles of operations are more likely to be in harmony with local customs and traditions. Akpan (2005) stated that civic engagement allows older adults to be involved in the organizing, orienting, carrying out though not necessarily financing community projects. They meet their obligations through payment of taxes, levies and other civic commitments. Akinbade (1997) agreed that civic engagement through participation in community project is both political and economic assets. This enables community development programmes to be erected on the strength, traditional beliefs and values of communities (their social organizations, indigenous skills, aspiration, local leadership and energy potentials) thereby practically equipping villagers with the capability to handle, their own affairs on step by step basis. In this way older adults achieve self reliance and self fulfillment.

Older people participation in community affairs serves to check and balance political activities. Participation allows fuller access to benefits of a democratic society (Wade, 1989).

Cahn and Camper (1968) suggested that there are three rationales for civic engagement in support of community-driven projects. First, merely knowing that one can participate promotes dignity and self sufficiency. Second; it taps the energies and resources of elderly adults within the community; finally, it provides a source of special insight, information, knowledge and experience which contributes to the soundness of community solutions. These collectively help to eliminate deficiencies in the community affairs (Christensen & Robinson, 1980).

3.3 Social networks established through formal membership in associations and support for community-based development

Social networks established through formal membership in associations play a major role in shaping the nature and the quality of rural life (Pinquart & Sorensen, 2000). Studies that examine the relationship between social networks factors in civic engagement and support for community driven project generally confirm a positive association between the phenomena (de Leon, Gold, Glas, Kaplan and George, 2011; Gray, 2009; Seeman, Lusignolo, Albert and Berkman, 2001) in Litwin (2010). A growing body of literature documents the importance of involvement in association activities in later life and the contribution of relationships that derive from personal choice towards enhanced community wellbeing. In civic engagement, membership in associations and contact frequency are measures of network interaction frequently associated with positive development outcomes (Gray 2009; Zunzunegui, Alvarado, Del ser, & Otero, 2003).

Social network as a sphere of social engagement by older adults has been linked with individual positive well being and that of the community. Involvement in community association projects or activities provides older individuals with meaningful contacts that can contribute to the improvement of community standard of living (Litwin, 2010). “Activity theory” explains this effect as stemming from the reinforcement of one’s role identity (Lemon, Bengtson & Peterson, 1972) in Litwin (2010). However, Litwin & Shiovitz-Ezra (2006) commented that recent research has underscored that it is the informal relationship aspects of community activities that may account for the positive outcomes. Everal, Lach, Fisher & Baum (2000) have also documented a positive relationship between support for community-driven development and benefits of social networks by older adults in late life.

The community engagement of long time residents such as neighbouring involvement in schools and places of worship and family care- giving has built social capital that continue to provide support for residents in their older years (Baiiiley, 2007). Middleton, Murie & Groves (2005). Saegert (2006) stressed that through civic engagement, social capital generated by older adults is used as a tool to sustain neighbourhood or redevelop deteriorating neighbourhoods. Older adults continue to find a sense of belonging and continue to be active within and contribute to community development through such established social networks.

3.4 Volunteering and older adult support for community

Civic engagement through volunteering is a platform for involvement in community driven projects (Black and Hughes, 2001; Cox 2000). Volunteering for community project may be seen as an expression of reciprocity or potentially as a direct outcome of social capital with implication for enhanced community wellbeing. The act of volunteering by older adults demonstrates a balance between the self interest and the community interest. As stakeholders in identifying and prioritizing community needs, volunteering helps to reverse the power relations in a manner that creates energy and voice for poor vulnerable rural dwellers. Older adults are interested in volunteerism as a means of exercising flexibility and being capable of engaging endlessly in the reconstruction of their community and reprogramming themselves to assist in responding to new challenges in the community. Moreover, they feel more comfortable to invest their energies and creative abilities since they lack financial resources to contribute.

The importance of volunteering in providing a range of services to the community such as administration and organizational services, support in sport and recreation; in relief agencies, community transport services, emergency services and respite care services in health etc is evident. Without a strong network of volunteers it is unlikely that the range of services local organizations in these areas currently offer could be sustained. Older adult's stakeholder's civic engagement through volunteering has important implications for community development project effectiveness. It guarantees local control to some extent over the distribution of benefits and sustainability (Common Wealth off Australia, 2002).

Volunteer groups function as links between individuals and larger community structures. For older adults, there are several benefits of volunteering for community-based development. Bridges (1974) cited four advantages to be gained from volunteering in community affairs: (1) The citizen can bring about desired change by expressing their desire, either individually or through a community group (2) They learn how to make desired changes. (3) The adult learns to understand and appreciate the individual needs and interests of all community groups. (4) The adult learns how to resolve conflicting interests for the general welfare of the group. Cook (1975) observed that voluntary participation can reduce the cost for personnel needed to carry out many of the duties associated with community action. Without this support, scores of worthwhile projects would never be achieved in many communities.

4. Theoretical framework

The "convoy model" of social networks suggest that people move through life together with significant others with whom they exchange goods and services (Antonucci & Akiyama, 1987). The notion of the convoy conveys both stability and change in one's interpersonal milieu. That is, the model implies that older adults maintain distinctive social network structure that accompany them over time but also these structures change in response to different community situations especially as it involves issues relating to improvement in community wellbeing.

5. Methodology

Study setting

Sampling technique

Three sampling techniques (simple random/ purposive and systematic random sampling) were used for selecting the sample for the study. Firstly, simple random sampling was used in selecting two out of the four local government areas that are host to Exxon Mobil in Akwa Ibom State. The host local government areas are Eket, Esit Eket, Ibeno and Onna. The researcher adopted the hat and draw method of simple random sampling in selecting the 2 local government areas. Secondly, purposive sampling technique was used to pick 3 communities each in the two Local Government Areas. The purposive sampling method was adopted for two reasons. Firstly, communities that have significant Exxon Mobil presence were picked for the study. Secondly, the significant presence of Exxon Mobil activities in these communities will provide enough data that will help in the analysis.

To draw the actual sample, systematic sampling technique was employed to enumerate the households in each sampled community into even and odd numbers (-1, -2, 3, 4, -5, 6, 7, 8, 9, etc). The households were thus numbered till the 70th house. The researcher selected 200 respondents from 3 communities in Eket local government area (cluster A) and 200 from 3 communities in Ibeno local government area (cluster B). In cluster A, the researcher selected 67 households from Etebi Idung Iwak community, 67 households from Ikot Usekong community and 66 households from Okon community. In cluster B, the researcher selected 67 households from Iwo-Achang community, 67 households from Ukpenekang community and 66 households from Mkpanak community. In these households, the

researcher decided to systematically select even numbered households to the exclusion of the odd numbered houses (i.e. household 2, 4, 6, 8, 10 etc) only one person in each household was involved in the study. With 200 respondents from each cluster (local government area); a total of 400 respondents participated in the study from the study area.



TABLE 2 Grassroot political participation and support for community-driven projects

Items	Respondents	
	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)
1. Participate in community project design and implementation decisions	126 (74.11)	44 (25.88)
2. Involvement in local politics for good governance	111 (65.29)	59 (34.7)
3. Vocal in community development matters	159 (93.52)	11 (6.47)
4. Access to resources for community projects	88 (51.76)	82 (48.23)
5. Involved in financing community project	15 (8.82)	155 (91.17)
6. Participate in village council meetings	150 (88.23)	20 (11.76)
7. Party affiliation for political activities	161 (94.70)	9 (5.29)
8. Fuller access to benefits of democratic society	165 (97.05)	5 (2.94)
9. Pay taxes and other community levies	160 (94.11)	10 (5.88)

Source: Field work, 2014.

TABLE 3: Social networks established through formal membership in associations

Items	Respondents	
	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)
1. Membership in civic organization	141 (82.94)	29 (17.05)
2. Feels sense of belonging to the village	137 (80.58)	33 (19.41)
3. Attend community meetings	162 (95.29)	8 (4.70)
4. Concern with self interest	27 (15.88)	143 (84.11)
5. Social relationships Established facilitates our community development effort	163 (95.88)	7 (4.66)
6. Support civic institutions in the community	141(82.94)	29 (17.05)
7. Relationship with community members marked by initiative, trust and expectations of reciprocal support	168 (98.82)	2 (1.17)
8. Cooperative behaviour is encouraged in association's community driven development efforts	163 (95.88)	7 (4.66)

Source: Field work, 2014

TABLE 4: Volunteering

Items	Respondents	
	Agreed (%)	Disagree (%)
1. Support in form of labour in Community project	166 (97.64)	4 (2.35)
2. Enthusiasm for community service	141 (82.94)	29 (17.05)
3. Support through financial resources	23 (13.52)	147 (86.47)
4. Develop project ideas	157 (92.35)	13 (7.64)
5. Support through material resources for development projects	159 (93.52)	11 (6.47)
6. Participate in community affairs willingly because of general community benefits	168 (98.82)	2(1.17)
7. Volunteering to fulfill obligation to the community as a civic duty	161 (94.70)	19 (11.17)

Source: Field survey, 2014

Results and discussion

Table 2 indicates grassroots political participation and older adults' support for community driven projects. Majority of them, 126 (74.11%) admitted that they participate in project design and implementation. 111 (65.29%) agreed that they are involved in local politics for the purpose of good governance. Majority of them are vocal in community development matters. Majority, 159 (93.52%) supported that they do not accept projects impose on them; 88(51.76%) said they have access to resources for community projects while 62 (48.23%) affirmed in the negative. Majority of them, 155 (91.17%) are not involved in financing community projects probably because many are retirees. Majority of the older adults, 150 (88.23%) participate in the village council meetings. They are also affiliated to political parties and show active involvement in politics. They pay their taxes and their community levies for development purposes. Involvement in decision making enables them have fuller access to the benefits of democratic society.

In terms of social networks, majority of the older adults have benefitted from membership in civic organization. 17 (80.58%) feel a sense of belonging to their , village 162 (95.27%) attend community meetings regularly, 143 (84.11%) objected that they are not concerned with self interest in community affairs; majority agreed that social relationships established facilitates their community development activities; 141 (82.94%) agreed that they support civic institutions. Majority 168 (98.82%) affirmed that their relationship with community members is marked with initiative, trust and expectations of reciprocal support. They also agreed that cooperative behaviour is encouraged in community development.

In terms of volunteering, majority asserted that they volunteer by providing labour in community project. 141 (82.94%) expressed their enthusiasm for community service. However, 147 (86.49%) stated that they are unable to support community projects financially, 157 (92.35%) affirmed that they volunteer through developing project ideas. 159 (9352%) agreed that they provide material resources for development projects; Respondents also stated that they participate in community affairs willingly because of potential benefits and they perceive volunteering as a means of fulfilling their community obligation.

Table 5: Pearson product moment correlation analysis of the relationship between grassroots political participation and older adults support for community-Driven development (N=170)

Variables	$\sum x$	$\sum x^2$	$\sum xy$	r-cal
	$\sum y$	$\sum y^2$		
Grassroot political participation(x)	5920	219850		
Adults support for CDD (y)	5545	185550	1988555	0.719*

Significant at 0.05, df=168, crit-r= 0.196

From table 5, it was observed that since the calculated r-value of 0.719* was found to be greater than the critical r-value of 0.196 needed for significance at 0.05 alpha level, with 168 degrees of freedom. With this result, the null hypothesis was rejected while the alternate hypothesis was otherwise retained. This means that there is a significant relationship between grassroots political participation and older adults support for community-driven development.

Table 6: Pearson product moment correlation analysis of the relationship between Social networks established through associational activities and older adults support for community-driven development (N=170)

Variables	$\sum x$	$\sum x^2$	$\sum xy$	r-cal
	$\sum y$	$\sum y^2$		
Social networks through associational activities (x2)	5915	219655		
Adults support for CDD (y)	5545	185550	198805	0.729*

Significant at 0.05, df= 168, crit- r = 0.196

The analysis from table 6 showed that the calculated r-value of 0.729* was found to be greater than the critical r-value of 0.196 needed for significance at 0.05 alpha level with 168 degrees of freedom. With this result, the null hypothesis was rejected while the alternate hypothesis was retained. This shows that social network established through associational activities has a significant relationship with older adults support for community-driven development.

TABLE 7: Pearson product moment correlation analysis of the coefficient between volunteering services and older adults support for community-driven development (N= 170)

Variables	$\sum x$	$\sum x^2$	$\sum xy$	r-cal
	$\sum y$	$\sum y^2$		
Volunteering services(X_3)	5930	219660	198785	0.692*
Adults supports for CDD (Y)	5545	185550		

Significant at $\alpha < 0.05$, $df = 168$, $Crit-r = 0.196$

Table 7 analytical table showed that since the calculated r-value of 0.692* was found to be greater than the critical r-value of 0.196, needed for significance at 0.05 alpha level, with 168 degrees of freedom. With this result, the null hypothesis was rejected while the alternate hypothesis was otherwise accepted. This means that volunteering services has a significant relationship with older adults support for community development.

Discussion

Civic engagement through grassroot political participation and older adults support for community-driven development

The results indicate that older adults are involved in decision making at village committee level. This means they participate in project designed and implementation; and are equally involved in local politics for good governance as indicated by their responses. This supports Patnam (1993) that active participation inculcates skills of cooperation as well as a sense of shared responsibility for collective endeavours. Findings agree with Mansuri (2004) that older adults involvement in community meetings/ activities has the explicit objective of reversing power relations in a manner that creates energy and voice for them, and allow them to have some control over development decisions. Participation allows them to have fuller access to benefits of democratic society (Wade 1989). Findings agree with Siisiainen (2000) that involvement of older adults expresses the sociological essence of communal vitality. A solution to the problem of common action and opportunism presupposes the development of voluntary collective action and it is connected to the inherited social capital in the community.

Civic engagement through social networks established through formal membership in association and older adults' support for community-driven development

Results of the analysis point to the existence of a relationship between social networks established through formal membership in association. Findings support Pinquart and Sorensen (2000) that social networks "play a major role in shaping the nature and the quality of rural life. Also findings agree with Gray (2009) that in civic engagement, membership in association and contact frequency are measures of network interaction frequently associated with positive development outcomes. Litwin's (2010) conclusions are confirmed here. He argued that involvement in community association activities such as development projects

provides older adults with meaningful contacts that can help contribute to the improvement of the community standard of living.

Civic engagement through volunteering services and older adults support for community-driven project

The result indicates that a significant relationship exists between civic engagement through volunteering services and older adults support for community-driven projects. Findings support Black and Hughes (2000) that civic engagement through volunteering services is an expression of reciprocity or potentially as a direct outcome of social capital with implication for enhanced community wellbeing. Cox's (2000) views are consistent with the findings. Cox averred that older adults are interested in volunteering because of their enthusiasm for enhanced community socio economic wellbeing. Moreover, they feel more comfortable to invest their energies and creative abilities as part of civicness towards services with the propensity to improve community life.

Summary, Implications and conclusion

The paper investigated the nexus between civic engagement and older adults support for community-driven projects in Oron and Udung Uko Local Government Areas, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The result showed that older adults' community engagement level is high. The analyses revealed that older adults are generally more involved in grassroots political participation, establishing social networks through formal and informal membership in associations and volunteering services. The grassroots government should provide resource and support older people to address their own issues and develop their own projects; recognize and address their barriers to civic engagement. Policy implication of the findings of this study suggests that civic engagement enhances older adults support for community-driven projects through local political participation, social networks established through associational activities and volunteering.

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