

## Enhancing Community Participation for Rural Development in Central Ejagham of Cameroon: Challenges and Prospects

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Community participation in rural development is no longer a new terminology in the development lexicon of developing countries. The Central Ejagham Community, in response to their development problems and the inability of the government to improve on the situation took a bold step by participating in development programmes in order to add value to their lives and to secure a better future for the community. The aim of this study is to examine the barriers was strategies to overcome them so as to enhance community participation in Central Ejagham. The paper adopts qualitative methods such as interviews, focus group discussions, detailed field observations which were complemented by secondary data sources and content analysis. We observe that the level of participation in a majority of the projects falls either within the “tokenism” or the “citizen control” rungs of Sherry Arnstein’s Ladder of Citizen Participation. In addition, although “tokenism” rung projects in Central Ejagham receive much financial and technical support, although they are saddled with commitment-related challenges. Conversely, projects at the “citizen control” rung are characterized by significant commitment but are hampered by limited (financial and technical) resources implying that meaningful development could not be registered for such projects. To further enhance community participation, we recommend that projects at the “tokenism” rung which are generally viable in terms of financial and technical capacity be stepped up to the “citizen control” level, in order to guarantee maximum participation for better results. In addition, we suggest that the legislative arm of the government should introduce a bill on the need to effectively support community developmental efforts. Finally, a platform to guarantee the sustainability of projects and to ensure the adequate dissemination of information on sourcing for external funding to support projects should be introduced.

*Key Words:* Community participation, rural development, central Ejagham

### Introduction

For a long time now, it is common knowledge that the ‘top-down’ approach in rural development has often failed to reach the intended objective of improving the lives of the rural poor in many communities (Cernea and Ayse, 1997). This realization gave way for the adoption of the more edifying ‘bottom-up’ approach to development. This new stakeholder approach has significantly improved results of development efforts, mainly based on its ability to enhance community commitment, participation and support.

The term ‘community’ has received considerable attention in various disciplines recently. Communities are sometimes viewed as the building blocks of a wider society, and therefore the community question may be superseded by the bigger question of what constitutes a ‘society’. Communities are defined by ‘social interaction’ – interpersonal discourse based on shared experience, which shapes values and attitudes and creates a group of people – residing in close mutual proximity – who

come to identify themselves as a social grouping (Gallent, 2008). Community is a product of experience, interaction and identity: bonds are created between individuals over time, extending beyond family networks to embrace co-workers, neighbours and other social acquaintances. Thinking on ‘dwelling’ goes back to the work of Martin Heidegger (1971) who argued that people do not merely ‘live’, but they ‘dwell’ in the sense that they create a place for themselves in the world, becoming part of a bigger whole. Indeed, ‘dwelling identifies the individual with the community’ and the ‘security of dwelling gives us the ability to participate within the community’ (Gallent, 2008).

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People become 'part' of a place which, for them as individuals, becomes 'meaningful' (Gallent, 2008). The logical implication is that members of the community often have and share norms, goals and objectives and develop the commitment to work towards the attainment of the set goals. This brings to fore the notion of participation which remains an essential part of the community-driven development process.

Community participation as viewed by the World Bank is a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiative, and the decisions and resources which affect them (World Bank, 2004). Although many people agree that community participation is critical in development programmes, very few agree on its definition. Some additional definitions of community go as far as engulfing voluntary contributions to public programmes, irrespective of what role people play in shaping such programmes. Participation therefore defines the degree of involvement of rural people in shaping, implementing and evaluation programmes, and sharing the benefits. It is an active process in which intended beneficiaries influence programme outcomes and gain personal growth. Participation implies some level of collaboration and of shared ownership or responsibility (Stirling, 2005).

The history of community participation in development in Cameroon could be traced from the colonial era which saw the intervention of missionaries and colonial governments in sectors such as education, health and water supply, among others. However, due to limited funds, it was difficult for a body in charge of community development to be created. It was only on the eve of independence, precisely in 1959, that, through the support of UNESCO, a Department of Community Development was created (Njoh, 2002). This department today is lodged by Cameroon's Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MINADER) and receives considerable attention both at the national and international levels. The government of Cameroon's policy continues to shed light on the need for self-reliant development. This policy takes into consideration the fact that the warm arms of development impulses needs to be felt by all and sundry of the population; however, since governmental resources are inadequate, there is a need to encourage community-driven developmental activities which form an essential part of the development process of the country. Today, Cameroon Vision 2035, a development road map which seeks to transform Cameroon into an "Emerging Economy by 2035" considers community participation as an integral part of the process of emergence. Therefore, it could be deduced that at different phases of Cameroon's evolutionary process, premium has always been accorded to the encouragement of

community efforts in development (Kimengsi, 2011).

Despite the call for community-driven development, it is observed that generally, there exists a high degree of apathy in participating towards community development within the context of Cameroon (Kimengsi, 2011; Ebot, 2010; Njoh, 2002). This apathy stems, in part, from the fact that the local communities have lost confidence in community leaders due to the high degree of unaccountability and mismanagement of resources which are meant for such projects. Wherever these qualities exist and the community is committed in a rural development project, its realization becomes something very necessary to go by.

Central Ejagham Community which has, over the years, embarked on community development initiatives (with the help of external partners in some cases) needs to overcome a host of challenges and design policies to enhance community participation which forms an integral and essential part in their rural development process.

### **A Review on the Concept of Participation**

Participation as an ideology traces its roots to third world development. Owing to the failures of development projects in the 1950s and 1960s, social workers and field activists began to call for the inclusion of populations concerned with development in project design and implementation, monitoring and evaluation (Funwi, 2011). By the 1970s, the concept of participation in development which had, hitherto, assumed a political and electoral phase, witnessed a change, as it was increasingly considered as the backbone of the development process. As a new concept, participation was defined in both narrow and broad terms. In its narrow perspective, it was viewed as the active engagement of citizens within public institutions, an activity which falls into three realms: voting, election campaigning and contacting or pressuring either individually or through group activity. Participation was later broadly defined as a collective and sustained practice aimed at achieving common objectives, especially a more equitable distribution of the benefits of development. Not surprising therefore that The World Bank Learning Group on Participation sees the concept as a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources that affect them (World Bank, 2004). Participation may take various forms. It may be Passive. In this case people living in the area of the project may be told what is going to happen or has already happened but will have little or no other input). Participation for material incentive is a type of participation where people participate by being paid for labour in food or cash, for a pre-determined project (Dhimole and Tabiyo, 2010).

This may be done within the framework of a 'community' or as groups. Participation by Resource contribution requires people to participate by contributing a resource such as labour or money, to a pre-determined project). Participation by consultation suggests that people may be optionally consulted on projects where the majority of the decisions have been made. Their view may or may not be considered. In interactive participation, people participate by joining with external professionals in the analysis of their situation, developing action plans and determining common projects). Spontaneous mobilization describes a situation where people participate by taking their own initiative independent of external professionals to change their situation. This may lead to self-help projects or requests to other institutions for assistance (Dhimole and Tabiyo, 2010). Even though all these forms of participation are important, it is possible to deduce from the nature of their inputs that participation by resource construction, interactive participation and spontaneous mobilization have very significant roles to play in any successful and sustainable community development. Participation in the context of this study is viewed as the active involvement of a community through the initiation of projects, the mobilization of resources (financial, technical, material) and its implementation in any developmental activity. Whatever meaning is attached to this term, it is important to note that attention has, in the recent past, been focused on how to assess the role of community participation in development and to identify strategies to improve on community participation in the process of collective societal development.

Most governments and policy makers are today increasingly aware of the crucial role of community efforts in fostering rural development. They have therefore been increasingly involved in the policy-making process. Despite these efforts, many challenges to community involvement exist (Dukeshire and Thurlow, 2002). Understanding and anticipating these barriers and challenges is important when a community is getting organized for, or involved in policy activity. Most governments in developing nations complain of resource inadequacy to satisfy the development needs of all and sundry of her population. It is argued that if communities participate in rural development projects, not only would this be more cost effective but it would also have important developmental spin-offs such as improved cash income opportunities, skill development and a greater sense of ownership and enhance sustainability. In this connection, selective development projects could effectively be carried out. Therefore, it is a truism that no matter how well intentioned development targets are set, it is very difficult to achieve sustainable development without the participation of the people for whom the development is targeted.

"Community development" in former British colonies and "*animation rurale*" in former French colonies which were all based on colonial experience were adopted in the 1960s as development strategies which were later integrated into the plan for community development (Amungwa, 1984 cited in Njoh, 2002). The difference between these two approaches is based on their socio-cultural aspects, as "*animation rurale*" was based on outside support while community development was, and is still based on self-reliance so as to strengthen the capacity of self management.

Following the trend of decentralisation in most developing countries at independence, many African governments developed national policies to help organize rural populations into structures such as co operatives and community organizations through which the delivery of various marketing, education and extension services could be channeled to rural communities (Rahenna, 1992 cited in Njoh, 2002). Given the increasing tendency towards decentralization of political powers and public services in developing countries, the role of community participation is becoming essential in projects as communities are now given the opportunity to identify and define their problems. The central objective of local participation is to improve the quality of life of the poor and marginalized rural dwellers. The concept of local participation is thus seen as a basis for project success.

### The Problem

Since the government of Cameroon adopted the policy of self-reliant development, it has become incumbent on rural communities to come together and seek lasting solutions to their numerous problems as much as their resources could permit. The philosophy of community participation in development has registered significant success in the North West Region of Cameroon where most of these communities enjoy a number of facilities thanks to community efforts and in some cases, the support of some donor and mission institutions (Funwi, 2011). However, limited success has been registered for most enclaved and backward communities in the South West Region where significant developmental wants exist. One of such communities is Central Ejagham which, based on studies of regional economic disparities, is found in one of the most backward divisions of the South West Region of Cameroon – Manyu Division (Kimengsi, 2011).

Central Ejagham Community is facing the perennial problem of rural underdevelopment. This community has always fallen short of socio-economic amenities which can ameliorate the living standards of the rural dwellers. As a result of the problems plaguing the community and the inability of the government to provide most of their

amenities, especially with the advent of the economic crisis in the early 1990's, the rural dwellers of this area took a bold step by participating in development programmes in order to add value to their lives and to secure a better future for the community. Within this community, levels of participation in a majority of the projects vary from the "tokenism" to "Citizen control" rung of Sherry Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation. In addition, a number of challenges (rural poverty and depopulation, mismanagement, limited government support, conflicting interest and difficulties in sustaining the projects) have, at various project types and levels of participation stood against the effective community involvement in rural development projects. This therefore requires some intervention strategies to improve on these lapses so as to enhance community participation.

**Theoretical Framework**

Much exist in the literature which provides adequate theoretical underpinning to the study on community participation and community-driven development. Sherry presents a typology of eight levels of participation (Figure 1). These participation types are arranged in a ladder pattern with each rung corresponding to the extent of citizen's influ-

ence and power in determining the end product of a project. The bottom rung (manipulation and therapy) describe levels of non-participation whose objective is not to enable people to participate in planning or implementing programmes, but to enable community leaders and powerholders to educate participants. Rungs 3 and 4 indicates a progress to the level of "tokenism" which allows the have nots to hear and to have a voice, it includes information (3) and consultation (4). When proffered by powerholders as the total extent of participation, citizens may hear and also be heard. Rung 5 (placation) represents a higher level of tokenism since the groundrules allow have-nots to advise, but retain the powerholders the continued right to decide. Above rung 5 are higher levels of citizen power with increasing degrees of decision-making. Citizens engage into partnerships (6) that enable them to negotiate (Sherry, 1969). The top most rungs 7 (delegated power) and 8 (citizen control) are characterized by a situation in which have not citizens obtain the majority of decision making seats and/or full managerial power. From the eight rungs discussed, different rungs of participation could be deduced from the projects undertaken in Central Ejagham as would be discussed in the later section of this paper.

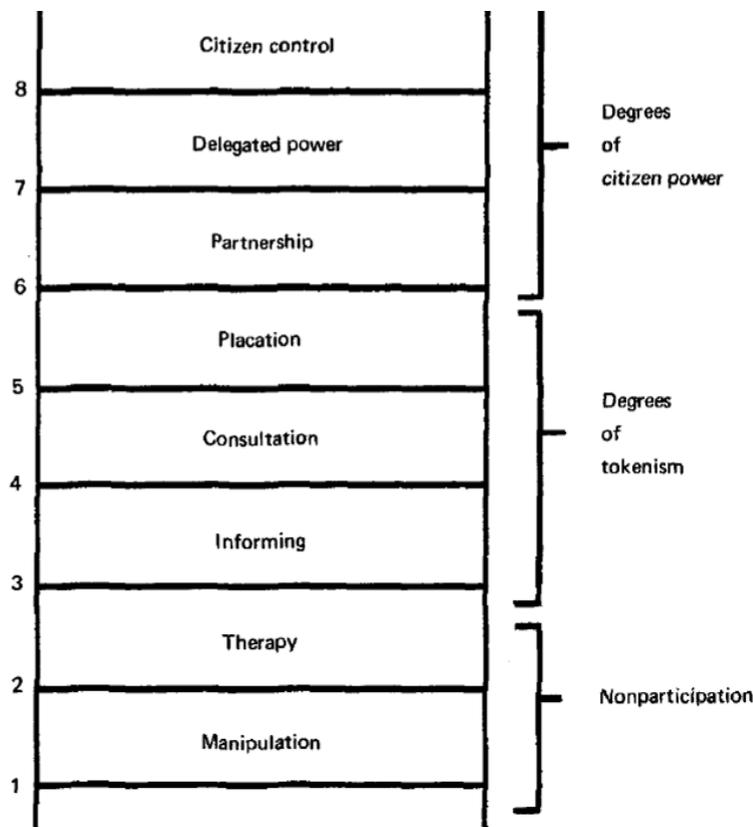


Figure 1: Eight rungs on a ladder of citizen participation (Sherry, 1969)

In addition, the basic needs approach philosophy which sprang up in the 1970s, called for popular participation, decentralization of planning and administration, and self-reliance at the local level to achieve these goals, popular organizations at grass-root levels had to be established and promoted, so that the effective mobilization and efficient use of local resources for development purposes can be ensured. This was closely followed in the 1980s by the self-help concept which stressed that instead of initiating popular participation, the need of self-help organizations that could be 'owned' and controlled by the rural poor themselves was clearly evident. Self-help approach encourages local population to undertake certain tasks jointly, which could be more rationally performed by a group than by individuals and motivate local populations to participate actively in achieving desired goals (World Bank, 2004).

The model of effective community participation as developed by Jon Lien (1983, cited in Njoh, 2002) is grounded in a horizontal relationship between beneficiaries and functionaries of develop-

ment projects. Project proponents and the community begin their dialogue at conceptualization and continue to work together until successes and failures of the project are fully evaluated and reintegrated into future planning. The community participation model has four stages. These include

**Stage 1: Information, Education and Planning (IEP) Stage** provides adequate and timely information, educating people about the development initiatives and outlining a plan of action which is critical in generating a process of participation.

**Stage 2: Implementation, Coordination and Monitoring (ICM) Stage** which holds that once local people are well informed about the development project, they are in a better position to plan activities by themselves to implement in a project.

**Stage 3: Ownership and Control Stage** where local people should share the project cost; if not in monetary terms, at least in time and effort. This sharing of cost will give them a feeling of ownership, belonging and commit them to the project.

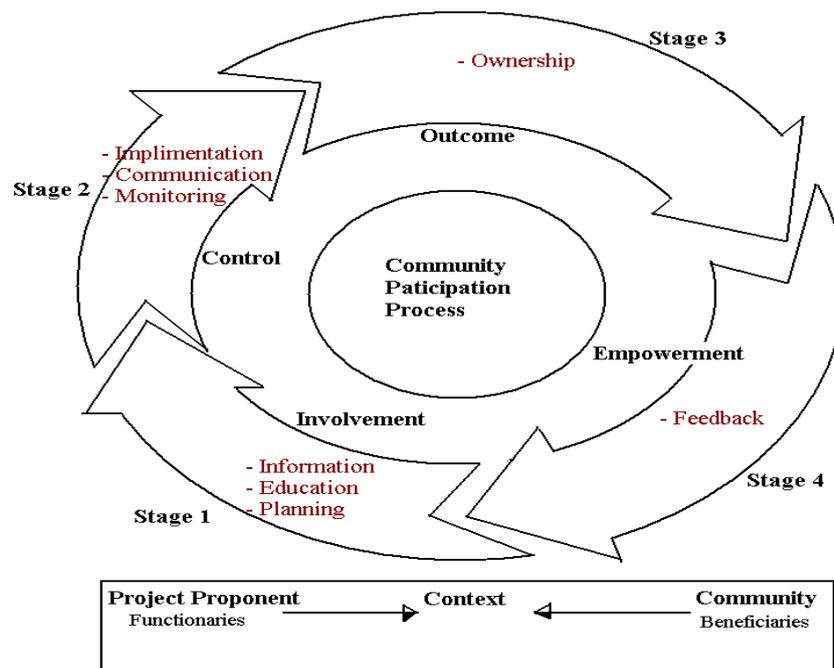


Figure 2.1: An Effective Community Participation Model (World Bank, 2004)

**Stage 4: Feedback Stage of Participation** includes consultations with local people to access their need and evaluate outcome of development projects, and hold local people accountable for successes and failure. Community participation in development project is hypothesized to be effective by involving local people in all four stages of the model. Each stage is the result of a set of elements that emerge

from the views, opinions and perspectives of the beneficiaries and the functionaries.

Furthermore, in the 1990s, the participatory development approach was introduced with emphasis still on the rural poor. This strategy greatly emphasizes the rural people, their participation in decision-making and implementation rather than on an enclave urban sector. The target group approach emphasizes the designation of development pro-

grams from the below (bottom-up) rather than top and down model and by the people rather than for the people (Bongartz, 1992). The study is further tied to the theory of "Development-from-Below" (Taylor and Mackenzie, 1992). This theory is largely influenced by the idea that if any meaningful development is to occur, it must be identified, motivated and controlled to a greater degree by the local population itself. This theory has grown out of a combination of different ideas related to attentive strategies that have been emerging as a challenge to the top-down traditional paradigm of development. It has been strongly influenced by Marxist oriented Dependency Theory and it is tied to the contribution of Third World leaders such as Mahamat Ghandi, Julius Nyerere and Schmacher's concept of "small is beautiful". The theory is based on the following characteristic. Firstly, that greater attention should be focused on marginalized or the poorest of the poor. That they should be assisted to become active participants of their own. The theory is also based on the assumption that development should be indigenous. It also represents a shift in development thinking from economic to social dimensions. Here emphasis is on the question of redistribution and access to resources necessary for development. The paradigm is in line with the recent government policy on rural development. Unfortunately, the government of Cameroon has minimally extended its support to rural communities. This has resulted to delays and failures in most of her envisaged projects thereby making the people not to meet their desired objectives since they lack both finance and technical know-how to support any reasonable and sustainable project.

In assessing the quality of participation in development projects, a key question is, were project documentation available to the local people? People should be in a position to see and know what is happening including how decisions are made at all stages of the project. Such information must also be available in a timely manner, so that people have a chance to be informed before decisions are made, and can try to influence them if necessary, to protect their own interest (Adnan *et al.*, 1985 cited in Njoh, 2002). We examine these issues in the Central Ejagham community of the South West Region of Cameroon.

### The Study Area and Research Methods

Central Ejagham (Figure 2) Community is located in the Centre of Eyumojock Sub-Division, which lies in the extreme West of Manyu and South of the Cross River State in Nigeria. It is located at Latitude 6° North of the Equator and longitude 9° East of the Greenwich Meridian. It covers a total surface area of about 1.296 km with a population of about 8.468 people (Eyumojok Rural Council, 2011). The community is made up of sixteen villages; they

include, Kembong, Nkemechi, Ebinsi, Bakwelle, Mkpote, Mbatop, Mafuni, Ossing, Ayukaba, Mbakang, Ajayukndip, Njeghe, Ewelle, Esagem, Afab and Ebam.

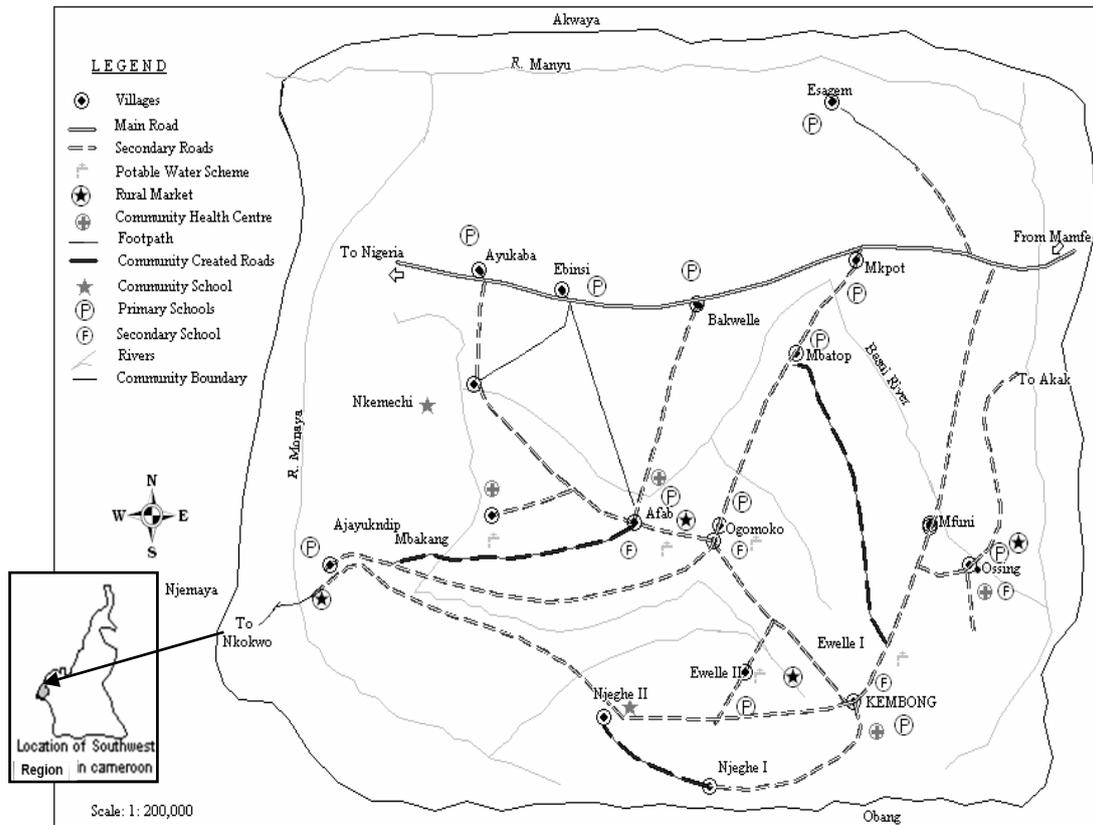
Agriculture constitutes the lifewire of this community as about 90% of the population is engaged in the sector (Taylor and Mackenzie, 1992). However, the level of agricultural development is still very low as it is mostly carried out on a subsistence basis with peasant plantations of cocoa, coffee and oil palms. Trade is another economic activity that is fast emerging in this community. This area serves as a road junction linking important places like Mamfe town, Nigeria, Kumba and the rest of Eyumojock Sub-Division. In this regard, the area serves as a collecting point for agricultural products and as a central place for the supply goods and services to neighbouring Obang and Njemaya clan who trek from the interior to sell and buy important items. But this central position and the different economic activities in the community does not fair well due to the problem of infrastructural inadequacy.

A combination of primary and secondary data was employed in this study. Primary data were gotten through the use of interviews which were conducted to 64 persons (4 from each of the 16 villages) within Central Ejagham. In addition, field observations and 4 focused group discussions (FGDs) were conducted. Based on background experiences and knowledge on the nature of the study area, the researcher was able to discuss with the traditional rulers, municipal authorities and other community members to obtain a proper orientation on the composition of members to undertake focus group discussions. The focus group discussions were done for 7 persons per group and each constitute economic operators (farmers, business men) and other key stakeholders in the area. They were selected based on their relevance to the research process, their relevance in data provision and their reliability and availability to provide information. The participants selected were between the ages of 30-50 years and they have lived in the area for at least 10 years. The focus group discussion guide was made up of 8 open ended questions pertaining to issues of community participation. The researcher explained the essence of the research to the 7 participants and with their consent, the discussion session began. To enhance understanding, the questions were translated and made simpler in Pidgin English but care was taken not to distort the sense or the content of the question. The researcher ensured that the exercise was participatory in nature as much as possible to give room for participants to elaborate on their views on the issues discussed. Secondary data were gotten from reports from farmers groups and other institutions in Central Ejagham, Council Reports and the con-

sultation of literature on studies related to community participation within the developing countries.

Based on the interactions through interviews and FGDs, complemented by secondary sources,

the researcher heavily employed the content analysis approach to examine the barriers and possible ways of enhancing community participation.



This saw the transcription and examination of participant’s diverse opinions. One of the key challenges observed for this method employed is the fact that it does not show in quantitative terms the degree to which these challenges exist. Furthermore, no simulation model was developed to project future developmental scenarios should the enhancement mechanisms be instituted. However, the study preferred the use of content analysis in order to clearly analyse without eliminating or suppressing the views expressed through interviews and focus groups discussions. Such an analytical strategy was chosen because it could clearly portray the intricacies associated with the question of motivating the 16 communities to mobilise their resources for local development. This gives a better insight on the situation for informed policy directives. Although there was a possibility for quantitative analysis, at least through the use of percentages, this was avoided because the researcher noted a situation of perceived skepticism in providing adequate and relevant data by the population. Consequently, caution was employed in order to avoid a situation of over or under representation of the actual situa-

tion on the ground. Hence, it was preferable to interact and deduce from the series of discussions their views of the current situation.

### Community Participation in Projects

Although a number of community projects have been undertaken in Central Ejagham, focus in this study is on water supply, road and bridge rehabilitation projects.

### Community Participation in Road Construction and Rehabilitation

Road construction and rehabilitation is a major community concern because the government could not meet up with her obligations. The lone government agency in charge of roads Public Works Department (PWD) is no longer functional. The Eyumojock Rural Council also lacks funds and equipment to maintain or create new motorable roads. This situation is a hindrance to economic activities. It is for such reasons that the community participates in maintaining the existing motorable

roads as well as in creating other minor roads to link farms and villages. A case in point is the local Amok bridge which is constructed by the commu-

nity every two years to link Central Ejagam and Njemaya community (Figure 3).

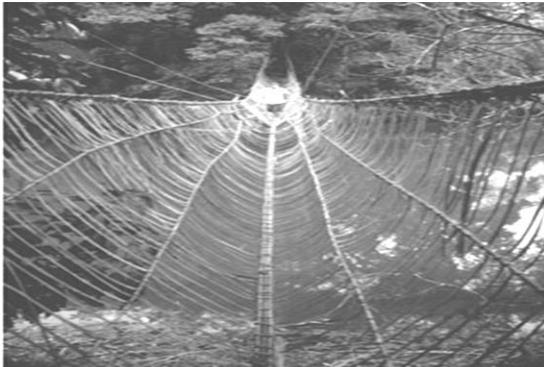


Figure 3: Amok Bridge across the Bakogo River and Njemaya community (Kimengsi, 2011)



Figure 4: Basui Bridge linking Ogomoko and Mbatop villages

Although community participation through the rehabilitation of roads and the construction of bridges and culverts have been laudable as a num-

ber of projects were accomplished (Table 1 and Figure 4), it important to mention that differential levels of participation were observed.

Table 1: Some Bridges built through community efforts.

| Bridge           | Linkage                     | Year          | Level of Participation             |
|------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|------------------------------------|
| Basui Bridge     | Ogomoko and Mbatop          | 1989          | Information (3) & Consultation (4) |
| Bakebe Bridge    | Ewelle I and Ewelle II      | 1990          | Information (3) & Consultation (4) |
| Esangakok Bridge | Mbatop and Kembong          | 1995          | Information (3) & Consultation (4) |
| Amok Bridge      | Central Ejagham and Njemaya | Every 2 years | Citizen Control (8)                |

Source: Ebot (2010)

Field evidence reveals that in most of the road and bridge maintenance projects, the levels of participation fall within the level of “tokenism” with a majority of it lying around the lower “tokenism” levels -involving information (3) and consultation (4) of Sherry’s ladder of participation. This also corresponds to Stage 1 (Information, Education and Planning, IEP) of Jon Lien’s effective community participation model as the community is provided with information about the development initiative. The observed level stems from the fact that although the projects are generally conceived by the community, due to limited funding, elites and other powerholders generally influence their outcomes while making provisions for information and consultation to register some “citizen participation.” The case of the Amok Bridge is peculiar in that it is a project whose initiation, financing and implementation is solely handled by the community. This project therefore represents the citizen control

(8) rung of Sherry’s ladder of participation and Stages 3 (ownership and control) and 4 (Feedback and Participation) of Jon Lien’s model of effective community participation as decision making and control is largely grassroots-driven.

### Community Participation in Potable Water Supply

A number of community water projects have been carried out in Central Ejagham. The community contributes in such projects either financially or through manual labour (Figure 5). Five of the sixteen villages that make up Central Ejagham (Kembong, Ogomoko, Ewelle, Afab and Ossing) are served by a main water project – the Tafoloko Water Project. Four villages (Mkpot, Ebam, Mbakang and Ajayukndip) have individual potable water schemes.



Figure 5: Community participation in pipe line construction (Field work, 2010)

An assessment of the Tafoloko water project situates it within the “tokenism” rung of Sherry’s ladder of participation and the Information, Education and Planning (IEP) stage of Jon Lien’s effective community participation model. The respondents indicated that though they were consulted for the project, elites and other powerholders’s influence were generally felt. The Mkpot, Ebam, Mbakang and Ajayukndip village water schemes represents the citizen control (8) rung of Sherry’s ladder of participation and Stages 3 (ownership and control) and 4 (Feedback and Participation) of Jon Lien’s model of effective community participation as decision making and control is largely grassroots-driven. Despite the ownership and control aspect, the projects operate on an intermittent basis because the communities lack the financial and technical capacity to sustain the project.

### **Challenges of Community Participation**

A number of challenges stand as barriers to the enhancement of community efforts in development. These challenges range from rural poverty and depopulation, inadequate government support, mismanagement of community efforts and the question of sustainability in the projects.

### **Rural Poverty and Depopulation**

Rural poverty arises from the fact that the population depends on peasant agriculture which is not lucrative; their little incomes (less than 50,000FCFA per month) can not provide them better quality of life (Kimengsi, 2011). Because of the situation of limited income opportunities, financial participation in projects is generally low. Furthermore, the active populations are forced to migrate and seek refuge in proximal and distant urban centres. The problem of rural depopulation thus

emerges and results in little contribution towards community development projects on the one hand, and also precipitates the outmigration of the youthful/active population which could have provided the labour for some community work. This partly explains the lack of human and financial resources for the Mkpot, Ebam, Mbakang and Ajayukndip water projects leading to their intermittent nature of operation.

### **The Problem of Sustainability**

Community development projects in Central Ejagham suffer from the problem of sustainability. Since these projects cannot be single handedly footed financially by the communities, they always seek the support of some institutions especially financially and technically. In most cases, a mechanism is not introduced to ensure sustainability; hence, the project collapses a few years after the withdrawal of support. The case of the intermittent nature of operation of the Mkpot, Ebam, Mbakang and Ajayukndip water projects come to the forefront. Their intermittent nature is largely attributed to financial and technical inadequacy which hinders the running of these projects. Most of the inhabitants are unable to pay monthly levy to pump water.

### **Limited Government Support**

While the government of Cameroon preaches the need for communities to pull their resources together and engage in rural development, it has done very little to support these communities either materially, financially or technologically. In Central Ejagham, a number of projects have been earmarked and government support solicited. However, such support is either not attended to, or very little support is given to the community. Most “citi-

zen power” level of participation projects which are initiated and controlled by the local population have limited support from the government. This limits the financial resources of the project and despite commitment by the local population, limited financial participation on their part negatively affects the life and sustainability of these projects.

### **Mismanagement of Community Development Funds**

Every project succeeds and become sustainable when there is proper accountability regarding the execution of the projects. Respondents in the study area decry an alleged high level unaccountability, mismanagement and embezzlement of community development funds by leaders who, in most cases, go unpunished. This situation which was observed for most projects in the “tokenism” rung has generated an atmosphere of mistrust and lack of enthusiasm towards participation in community projects – the population do not see themselves “risking” their meagre financial resources anymore. This situation corroborates the ideas of Farazi who concluded that one of the major impediments of community participation is the allegation that members of the public are not really interested in becoming involved because of aspects such as mistrust and mismanagement. Local people should share the project cost, if not in money, at least in time and effort. This will give them a feeling of ownership and commit them to the project (Farazi, 1997 cited in Njoh, 2002). In the case of Central Ejagham, apathy is largely attributed to mismanagement and mistrust of local leaders.

### **Conflict of Interest in Pressing Needs**

The development needs of rural communities are enormous and what community development projects do is only to tackle basic and pressing needs based on their resources. This implies that on their scale of preference, an opportunity cost must be made so that one is solicited at the expense of the others. It is difficult for members of the Central Ejagham Community to agree on the projects to be initiated. Consequently, some imposition is observed especially by powerholders. This situation largely applies to “tokenism” rung projects in Central Ejagham and creates an atmosphere of disagreement, mistrust and apathy.

Being an enclaved rural environment, this area is characterized by the conspicuous absence of law enforcement officers who, in most cases, are concentrated in the urban and highly accessible areas. People default even a day set aside for community labour by either going to their farms before it is dawn or they sleep in their farms on the eve of the day of community work so as to continue their farming activities undisturbed in the following day.

### **Enhancing Community Participation in Central Ejagham**

In order to enhance community participation, projects at the “tokenism” rung which are generally viable in terms of financial and technical capacity needs to be stepped up to the “citizen control” level to guarantee maximum participation for significant results. This could be achieved through the full involvement of inhabitants in projects.

The policy of the government on self-reliant development should be backed by action and adequate support. It is imperative for the legislative arm of the government to introduce a bill on the need to effectively support community developmental efforts. This will make “citizen control” rung projects to become more effective. The application of the numerous intervention activities by the collective efforts of the government, the local population and donor agencies at different levels will encourage enthusiasm and enhance the participation of communities for rural development.

Support programmes and institutions should ensure that in cases where they intervene to support communities, they should prepare a platform for sustainability to ensure that communities can continue with such initiatives even after their support is withdrawn. There is also a need to intensify out-of-village donations to support projects in this community.

Project funding possibilities should be communicated to this community by the Council and other development stakeholders and the procedural steps for funding projects should be duly communicated to the project coordinators to give them the opportunities to solicit adequate funding for community projects. More so, a mechanism of good governance (management) in order to foster development and reduce conflict should be instituted.

To ensure accountability and success, committees should be formed to execute different functions. For example, there should be committees in charge of budgeting and financing, project execution, supervision and auditing. Also, the community should create organs to manage finished project in order to ensure its sustainability. The above mentioned organs should be answerable to the throne (chief) who, with the help of his councillors and regulatory organ (Ekpe society), will help to resolve conflict and to punish defaulters. If these strategies are implemented, it will enhance commitment of the inhabitants in rural development projects. In some cases, the heavy arms of the law should be employed to punish those who mismanage community resources.

The two options of rigorous government investment in infrastructural development and the need to enhance the bottom-up and goal-oriented approach in development, especially in the development of basic services should be solicited. In

other words, these two actions should be undertaken simultaneously; while the community concentrates in providing some basic services, the government should support through major infrastructural development projects. This will further sustain community efforts.

The implementation of objective-oriented projects (Figure 6) is very necessary in enhancing community development. An interdisciplinary approach in the management of resources could be

very instrumental as it involves an interdisciplinary team work in a goal-oriented objective which could be designed through projects to enhance development.

The perception that people have about a particular project depends on the knowledge they have about it. Therefore the people of Central Ejagham should be educated on the aims and objectives of the project, the importance of the project to individuals and the community.

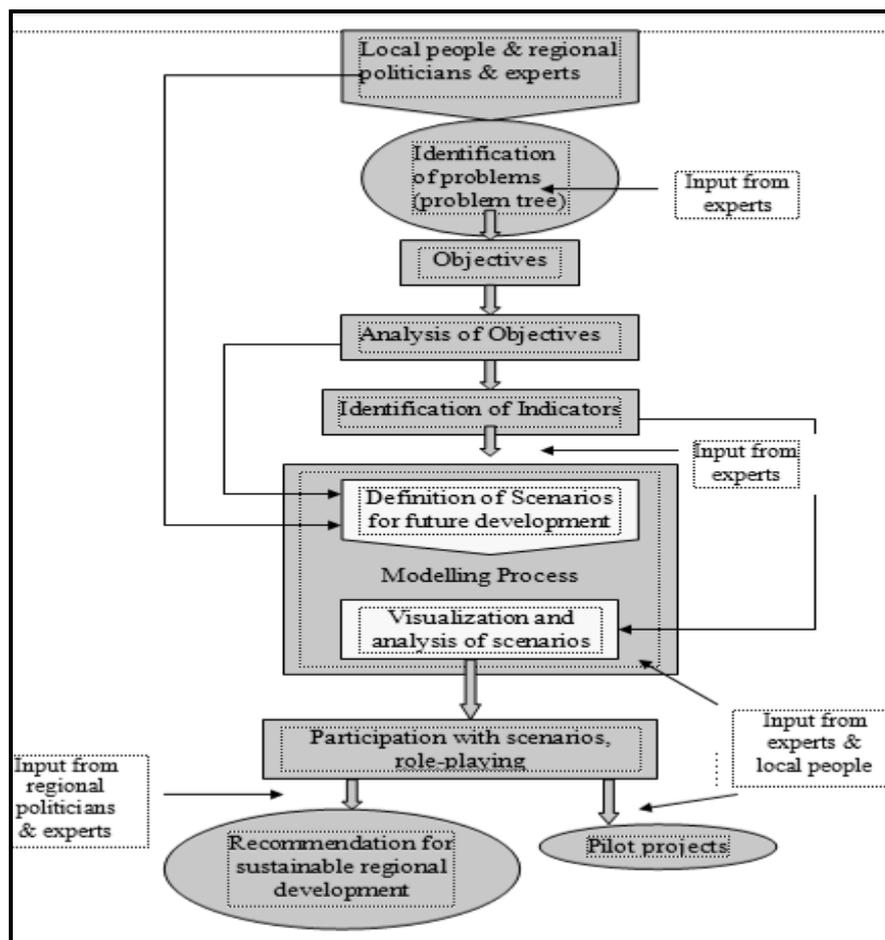


Figure 6: The Process of Objective-oriented Project Design (Hurni *et al*, 2008).

It should begin with a stakeholder analysis, identification and definition of the problems which are then transformed into objectives for further development with the specification of key indicators and actors. The successful completion of these projects requires the integration of local people, politicians and the use of experts where necessary.

Once a project has been identified, a detailed study of the resources should be undertaken and the goals and objectives of the project streamlined. They should plan for the budgeting and financing of the projects, outline the programme to achieve their desired objectives and create competent or-

gans to monitor and evaluate the project in order to know the extent of success or failure at each stage with respect to their objectives. Added to that, a project brought forth should be accomplished before the start of another. By so doing, it will reduce the number of failures in projects and awaken community spirit to participate.

## Conclusion

Through at varying degrees of participation, community efforts have been instrumental in the im-

proving of the socio-economic livelihoods of the highly agrarian populations of Central Ejagham. A connection exists between the level of participation and the challenges identified. Although “tokenism” rung projects in Central Ejagham receive much financial and technical support, they are saddled with a number of challenges such as disagreement, mistrust and apathy and conflicting interest. Projects at the “citizen control” rung are characterized by significant commitment but hampered by limited resources (financial and technical). Hence they are characterized by challenges such as intermittent operation, limited government support and sustainability.

In view of the axiom that roads bring development to areas and communities which they serve, a deal has been struck between the government of Cameroon and Nigeria, together with the African Development Bank (ADB), Japan International Corporation Agency (JICA) and the World Bank which will see the tarring of the Bamenda-Ekok-Mfum 443km Road. This project which is dubbed the “Bamenda-Enugu Multinational Highway and Transport Facilitation Programme” will probably assist in laying fertile grounds for successful and sustained community development projects which have also failed because of the problem of inaccessibility.

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