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Stakeholders Engagement and Project Implementation at Cross River Basin Development Authority (CRBDA) in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Stakeholders' involvement is vital in every project aimed at community development. However, the success of a project is sometimes compromised when there is little or no collaboration and partnerships, as well as a lack of commitment by the parties in the course of implementation. This paper examined the effect of stakeholder inclusion in the implementation of the projects implemented by the Cross River Basin Development Authority (CRBDA) in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The research adopted a descriptive survey design to evaluate the association that people and organisations portray in terms of organisational engagement, communication, commitment, and help. The population of the study is 251 respondents, which includes local representatives, government employees, CRBDA employees and contractual parties, who were purposively selected using a census sampling method. The main data collection tool was questionnaires, which were filled in by the respondents, as well as secondary data from the CRBDA reports, policy documents and from other written sources. Both the basics of quantitative analysis and the chi-square (χ^2) tests were used to handle this data. It becomes clear from the data that a lack of collaboration, leadership and commitment from some stakeholders renders project implementation inefficient, as the parameters also result in delay of the project and wastage of resources that could be avoided. The paper concludes with suggestions for focused attention on decision-making in all aspects, enhanced communication channels, and means of ensuring commitment to developmental activities through capacity building and other positive steps. Such insights are imperative in ensuring that projects are successful, long-lasting and justify the expectations of the stakeholders.

Keywords: Stakeholder engagement, project implementation, commitment, Cross River Basin Development Authority, participatory decision-making

Introduction

Stakeholder engagement is gaining increasing momentum in need of effective promotion of all the development projects, whether big or small. According to Belay (2003), in the case of Nigeria, many of the infrastructural and water management developmental projects are normally implemented by government agencies, and one of these agencies is the Cross River Basin Development Authority (CRBDA). The agency's scope of work enhances the socio-economic well-being of the beneficiaries of the Cross River Basin by ensuring optimal utilisation of the water resources in the basin. The key areas include flood control, agriculture (irrigation), fishing facilities, and power generation. Also, stakeholders such as the government at various levels, local communities, those affected by the project and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), as well as development partners, are important in this push. They can be involved in many ways, from simple consultations to collaborations and even making decisions, as well as tracking the progress of the project. In particular, their presence, commitment and encouragement in a project can heavily influence the outcomes of the project by ensuring better use of available resources, local knowledge incorporation and reducing resistance to changes. In addition, there is the calling, where affected communities' needs and priorities are used to craft project objectives, minimise conflict and ensure the sustainability of the intervention, and project implementation.

The roles that different stakeholders play are well documented, but how these roles translate to the exercise of Corporate Social Responsibility and Business Development Activities (CRBDA) in Akwa Ibom State in Nigeria remains largely underrated. In this state, as in many others in Nigeria, numerous communities are entirely dependent on water for their agricultural activities as well as sustenance in the villages and development projects have been unsuccessful because of widespread implementation delays and community opposition, amongst other faults. Given that many projects fail due to inadequate engagement, often at the expense of development progress, the stakeholders need to invest more in all spheres of interventions. Something which is found in a majority of the project evaluations or review reports is the lack of involvement of the major stakeholders in the planning process of the activity. This can lead to sabre rattling, cost overruns, and most importantly, reasons why the project may not be realised even after a successful implementation. While it is common for project sponsors to attribute project failures to technical and financial limitations, sectors that can increase turnaround time, such as stakeholder dimensions, regardless of their importance, have not been fully examined. The indigenous people may feel left out of decision-making processes, the proper carrying out of services by the government may be lacking, and developmental partners or civil society groups may not be operating at the operational levels necessary. This paper will deal with how these gaps interfere with the attainment of project objectives, especially within regions like Akwa Ibom, where the socio-cultural values and local governance structures significantly influence the outcomes of a given project. Therefore, this study aims to establish how stakeholder commitment, support, consultation, and collaboration practices enhance the implementation of CRBDA projects in Akwa Ibom State. The study further aims to determine how the interaction amongst these stakeholder groups can be improved to reduce the number of negative outcomes in the undertakings.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to examine the influence of stakeholder engagement on the implementation of projects by the Cross River Basin Development Authority in Akwa Ibom State.

The specific objectives include:

- i. To examine the relationship between poor collaboration and partnership in project implementation outcomes at the Cross River Basin Development Authority in Akwa Ibom State.
- ii. To assess how inadequate stakeholder commitment and support influence project implementation outcomes at Cross River Basin Development Authority in Akwa Ibom State

Research Questions

To guide the study, the following research questions are posed:

- i. What is the relationship between poor collaboration and partnership in project implementation outcomes at the Cross River Basin Development Authority in Akwa Ibom State?
- ii. Has inadequate stakeholder commitment and support influenced project implementation at Cross River Basin Development Authority in Akwa Ibom State?

Research Hypotheses

- i. Poor Collaboration and partnership tend to enhance project implementation outcomes at the Cross River Basin Development Authority in Akwa Ibom State
- ii. Inadequate Stakeholder commitment and support influence project implementation at the Cross River Basin Development Authority in Akwa Ibom State.

Review of Conceptual and Empirical Literature

Concept of Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder engagement, rather than being an ad hoc process, has been defined as a systematic strategy or approach geared towards including either people, a certain entity or group that is directly or indirectly involved in the scope of a project, program or in a susceptible decision-making process (Freeman, 1984; Bourne, 2015). In asset financing, there are primary and secondary stakeholders. Primary stakeholders are those who have a direct involvement in the project, such as local communities and the beneficiaries, while secondary stakeholders are those who may have either an influence on the project but are not directly involved, for example, the NGO's or the central government (Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997). The art of stakeholder engagement is promoting active involvement and partnership between the implementer and the parties involved. Indeed, it is a significant factor of project success because it ensures that project objectives meet the demands of the relevant stakeholders, resolves conflicts and reduces resistance of the people affected by the implementation of the project. Engagement is not merely consultation; it encompasses a continuum of involvement ranging from information sharing and consultation to collaboration and joint decision-making.

In Nigeria and more specifically in development work, there is an increased awareness of the importance of the stakeholders, especially with the type of challenges encountered in the course of development activities: recurring project delays, misallocation of

resources, and the general lack of cooperation from communities (Ogunlana, 2016). In the case of the federal parastatal, the Cross River Basin Development Authority (CRBDA), stakeholder management is all the more critical as it is inevitable for the authority to engage stakeholders in functional planning, execution and operation of projects measurably in the use of water resources. Administrative officials of a government entity like a Federal River Basin Development Authority in running a new area of water that meets the specified river basin level, make provisions for citizens to participate in planning, the general public or any other category of resource users helps to design appropriate institutional development, which give proper support that guide how a watershed is being managed and this integrates incentives as well as policy reforms for corrective intervention - Capacity development issues' (Adeyemi & Adebayo, 2018). Key components of effective stakeholder engagement include:

- i. **Identification of stakeholders:** Recognising all parties that are affected by or have influence over the project.
- ii. **Analysis of stakeholder interests and influence:** Understanding the priorities, expectations, and level of influence each stakeholder holds.
- iii. **Communication and consultation:** Establishing channels for meaningful dialogue and feedback.
- iv. **Collaboration and participation:** Involving stakeholders in planning, decision-making, and implementation processes.
- v. **Monitoring and feedback:** Continuously assessing stakeholder satisfaction and adjusting engagement strategies as necessary (Bourne, 2015; Reed et al., 2009).

Studies reveal that projects that conform to the wishes of the public are more successful, and this is often realised through the building of trust, appropriation of resources and developing a "sense of psychological ownership" amongst the project beneficiaries (Bryson, Crosby, & Bloomberg, 2014). Unfortunately, ineffective engagement can lead to confusion, conflict, and collapse, most notably in multi-stakeholder arenas such as water resource management in Nigeria (Adelekan & Asiyanbi, 2020). Stakeholder engagement has a broader scope and is an extremely relevant component for the sustainable project. Stakeholder demands cannot be overly emphasised, especially in challenging development projects. As regards the CRBDA, the involvement of stakeholder perspectives contributes to bridging the gap between project planning and execution, making the water developments in Akwa Ibom State practical and enduring.

The Effects of Stakeholder Engagement on Project Outcomes

The stakeholders play a critical role in the success of the projects. The challenge of meeting the needs of sustaining gains in development projects belongs, to a great extent, to the public sector, which is responsible for executing the CRBDA projects. Engagement is about ensuring that projects are well constructed and run by taking into account all the relevant social actors, including government departments, the local population, NGOs and the intended consumers, ensuring that potential blockages are anticipated and dealt with at an early stage thereby increasing efficiency and preventing unnecessary hold-ups in the course of the project (Bourne, 2015; Adelekan & Asiyanbi, 2020). It facilitates the efficient utilisation of available resources since knowing what stakeholders want enables project managers to know how best to

allocate funds, labour and technical inputs, enhance construction of useful features, such as water supplies and water for agriculture in Akwa Ibom State, in the regions with the highest agricultural productivity (Freeman, 1984; Ogunlana, 2016). As an advancement, the theory argues that stakeholder engagement contributes to less resistance and promotes the participatory use of an infrastructure or a program (Bryson et al., 2014; Adeyemi & Adebayo, 2018).

The involvement of people and groups also increases compatibility in relations, which results in less waste in dispute resolution- such practices best function in areas where community-based resources are scarce, and water issues can be incendiary. The water sector becomes a war playing game as soon as there is enough water to quench any level of thirst within a society, because the drivers towards development create demand and motive for war instead of the best utilisation of the resource (Reed et al., 2009). More importantly, engagement in monitoring and evaluation, including the establishment of irrigation schemes, flood protection, and fisheries management facilities, ensures the effective functionality of such assets even after closure of the project (Adelekan & Asiyanbi, 2020). Finally, there are dynamics within stakeholder empowerment that improve governance and adoption in that those who make decisions and follow up with the actions on the utilisation of resources or conduct activities, can be questioned by the people involved and pass on the question of worth and time used (Bryson, Crosby, & Bloomberg, 2014; Bourne, 2015). In summary, the impact of stakeholder involvement suggests that effective stakeholder management is a more complicated and, in fact, an indispensable factor for CIDB projects in Akwa Ibom State, tolerance efficiency, acceptance, sustainability, and successful project implementations in the area.

The Stakeholder Engagement Practices in Nigeria

Participation of stakeholders in Nigeria has gone through some changes in the direction of recognition that active involvement of a variety of players is essential to achieve sustainable development results. In the context of Nigeria, this involvement is undertaken by government agencies, development organisations, non-government organisations (NGOs) and the private sector and employs several strategies in stakeholder participation in project planning, implementation and evaluation (Ogunlana, 2016). These moments are mostly observed in the fields of resource management (water), agriculture, construction and in other areas where the development of projects has a direct effect on the host communities. One widely used approach is the use of public forums where discussions, focus groups and town hall meetings are held between the stakeholders and the society so that the opinions of the stakeholders are gathered, and their leaders explain the reasons for all projects. Such an approach helps the institution administrators to appreciate the needs of the people, focus on cultural limits and indigenous knowledge required for the facilitation of the program. Community Development Boards (CDB) of CRBDA, for example, in most cases, hold public meetings with the assistance of stakeholders such as common farmers, fishermen, or local governments in Akwa Ibom State to develop the water facilities that will serve the best interests in their society, enabling organic implementation of the piloted initiatives.

The cooperative design and consensus-building have been effective strategies as well. This is where actors are involved in making definitive decisions and taking responsibility for the execution of the concerned project (Adelekan & Asiyanbi, 2020). Participation-

based approaches such as co-operatives or joint project committees, enable different layers of government, CSOs and community members to ensure greater commitment and responsibility. In Nigeria, collaborative approaches have been utilised in several water projects, irrigation schemes, and community-based fishing schemes aimed at enhancing the effective management of the projects and natural resources. Development of capacities and training is an important part of the engagement of stakeholders. Stakeholders in partnerships and the like, beyond the technocrats, conduct it as a norm, where most societies undergo once in a while. For instance, more often than not, one can expect that within water resource projects, the local farmers can be trained on new irrigation techniques or other water-related practices so that they can adequately contribute towards project implementation.

Further, it is argued that to ensure the continuous participation of different stakeholder groups, project planning centres need to establish and maintain monitoring systems, as well as establish mechanisms for feedback (Reed et al., 2009). Thus, the use of practices like community scorecards, participatory audits, digital reporting platforms, etc. are provided to the stakeholders so that they can evaluate the performance of the project and suggest the corrections they find necessary or demand answers from the service providers, to their contribution on the project, etc. It is in such instances that the above is particularly relevant in countries like Nigeria, with massive corruption, which endangers the achievement of a project (Atakpa & Akpan, 2023). There are still constraints within Nigeria despite the introduction of these measures, for instance, lack of finance, government agencies not cooperating, limited ability to comprehend information in the rural sector with its remote areas, absence of these even in most countries and weak political will of the local rulers (Ogunlana, 2016). To facilitate civic engagement, these barriers need to be addressed, and stakeholder involvement should be one of the key features of each intervention.

Concept of Consultation and Collaboration in Decision-Making

Among many approaches to engaging stakeholders in development projects, consultation and collaboration in decision-making are perhaps the most important and influential. Consulting entails eliciting stakeholders and proffering them the opportunity to provide their views, perceptions or feedback mainly on the factors that concern them more so on project timelines rather than policies or administrative decisions (IAP2, 2018). It is a tool for ensuring that the parties impacted get to express themselves, airing concerns as they arise and ensuring eminent inspection and appraisal before coming up with an alternative approach (Reed et al., 2009). Consulting generally implies travel and planning as well as connecting stakeholder groups centred on structured activities such as other public functions, research inquiries, visit reports and stakeholder meetings, which enables them to seek suggestions and disseminate the same in the planning and implementation chapter of the project (Bryson et al., 2014).

Consultation, referring to the knowledge-sharing that occurs between the project manager and the stakeholder, only deviates a little from collaboration. Collaboration goes beyond consultation and suggests a two-way thinking, active involvement, equal distribution of responsibilities and other aspects when the stakeholders and the project officers work together towards a common goal. When drawing attention to participatory processes, stakeholders first have their say and then undertake co-designing

interventions. They also focused on co-implementation and the joint activities conducted to discuss, adopt and monitor the results and impacts (Bourne, 2015). Collaboration puts the aim on creation warmth relationship, freeing from egotism between stakeholders, which allows stakeholders to contribute personally to the success of the project. They carry out their activities because they are involved in the project voluntarily and are answerable in one degree or another (Freeman, 1984).

Collaboration and consultation in the Nigerian developmental ventures have a particular importance in view of the wide variety of culturally-universal and political features that play a significant role in the outcomes of projects (Ibanga, 2016). Consultation and collaboration practices and principles are essential to the smooth functioning of government parastatal bodies like the Cross River Basin Development Authority, including the engagement of local communities, government agencies, NGOs, and other societal stakeholders in the course of public projects. There is an African saying that “You cannot shave a man’s head in his absence,” meaning that you can’t make decisions concerning people unless they are present and witness the process and course. This can also involve self-assessment evaluation, which also involves members of the community in the administrative activities, and it makes the planning and implementation of the project free from distortion and an unanticipated rise in the level of cost. For example, a joint planning of an irrigation scheme or flood control infrastructure in Akwa Ibom State can reduce the likelihood of water disputes over quantity and quality, can enhance distributive justice, and can help improve the sustainability of the project results (Adelekan & Asiyambi, 2020). There is sufficient data that confirms that more consultation and collaboration with affected and surrounding communities leads to better project performance, higher acceptance from the community, and promotes the sustainability of the project (Bryson et al., 2014; Reed et al., 2009). On the contrary, lack of consultation and prospects of poor collaboration often create strong resistance within the local populace, triggering delays and an inability to make proper use of the infrastructure constructed. This has shed more light on the importance of these processes in the decision-making procedure for development projects.

Approaches to Consultation

Undertaking stakeholder involvement while implementing project management can be done through several ways, all of which are amenable to the situation, including the level of stakeholder engagement as well as the project’s complexity. Consultation is the act of a structured process of seeking information from other people, who can be either the stakeholders or the public, to help make decisions rather than just informing them of the decisions taken (IAP2, 2018, p. 45). When direct consultation is made, the main concern is the one-sided consulting models, and there is less chance to enhance the quality of consultation when performing the functions of acting commissioner.

i. Discussion Groups

Informal consultation relates to activities where a member inquires or solicits feedback on the proposed project design or impact assessment, either in a one-on-one, group setting, or over the telephone. This type of approach allows the team conducting the project to gain insight and positively build a conducive environment for the project (Bryson et al., 2014). They identified barriers and wrote them off. Informal consultations work better for rural areas in Nigeria, where there are well-established, respectful

ways of accepting and giving roles through the existence of clearly defined roles of elders (Ogunlana, 2016).

ii. Structure of Consultation

A structured consultation is a process where stakeholders receive guidance on how to take part in a program. These could come in various forms, such as questionnaires, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions or workshops, and public forums. Structured consultation is essential to the discussion and analysis of data concerning the employment of various communication techniques and devices (Reed et al, 2009). Moreover, such a structured process may depend on informal practices to support the original masterplan, i.e. one part of the SDP depending on the other (Cullingworth, 2008:152); for instance, the CRBDA may use such consultation to determine community needs in any one area and use the findings to plan, for example, irrigation or flood control projects.

iii. Participatory Consultation

The participatory consultation step entails gathering opinions and involving the people in the issues' analysis, making recommendations on how to address the same and, at times, even designing the programs. Among the anticipated steps of participation are techniques such as participatory rural appraisal, joint planning sessions, and stakeholder mapping exercises. Due to its effects, it is a useful method because it enhances the feeling of attachment to the outcomes and affects them primarily (Adelekan & Asiyebi, 2020).

iv. Digital or E-Consultation

As the information and communication technology (ICT) sector becomes more advanced, digital consultation is becoming a more plausible manner, and one that is more preferable given that it has the potential to also work in communities which are spread out physically (Ibanga et al., 2024). This method uses online questionnaires, social online platforms, webinars and mobile networks to target people that may seem difficult or too expensive to reach. (Bryson et al., 2014). In the context of policy making in Nigeria, the utilisation of e-consultation has been increasing over the years to complement what has already been done through traditional ways, so as to encourage greater and more active citizen participation and quick responses.

v. Multi-Stakeholder Consultation

In this approach, several stakeholder groups are consulted at the same time through forums, round tables, advisory boards, and such platforms. It is more likely that such a multi-stakeholder consultation will engage a variety of actors in deliberation on each other's arguments and thereby consensus raising means that it is positive factors beyond implementation stages (Bourne, 2015). For CRBDA projects, however, this approach becomes very important in achieving all-inclusive and sustainable decisions while serving the interests of local populations, state entities and NGOs as well.

Collaborative Models in Project Implementation

The notion of collaboration in project work implies structured cooperation and synergic efforts between the participants of the project and the execution of common tasks. It is a concept that stresses shared responsibility, joint management and the pooling of assets needed to bring about successful outcomes of any project (Bryson et al., 2015). Collaborative practices in the course of development assistance help in deepening the participation of

stakeholders such as government agencies, local communities, NGOs, and private partners in programme planning, delivery, and control of results, as opposed to their traditional exclusion from the development planning process (Bourne, 2015). Numerous collaboration tools and techniques have been proposed in project management, and some draw a line between some levels of cooperation and power available to stakeholders.

a. Network Collaboration Model

This model seeks to encourage stakeholders to work together in broad-based cooperative horizontal coalitions where none needs to surrender its power to the other. Informality and flexibility are prominent in these partnerships, with coordination being achieved through communication and trust (Provan & Kenis, 2008). For irrigation projects in water resource projects in Nigeria, especially, this may require networks including local farmers' organisations, community leaders and Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) who are working on any such project. For further capacity building, they may also share knowledge, enhance implementation activities and facilitate resource allocation (Adelekan & Asiyebi, 2020).

b. Hierarchical or Lead Agency Model

In this model, one organisation, especially a government or any project lead, takes the central decision-making position vis-à-vis other stakeholders who are reduced to performing an advisory or consultative role (Bryson et al., 2015). In the case of CRBDA projects, the planning and allocation of resources may fall under the jurisdiction of the lead agency, but relevant local authorities, NGOs and community members also need to be participants to argue about actions taken - a) without abuse of authority, and b) while considering the actual scenarios. The collective impact applies the principle of all stakeholders committing to a single agenda, the use of a common set of indicators, mutually reinforcing activities, frequency of communication, and the inclusion of backbone support institutions (Kania & Kramer, 2011). This is a clear example of a high-value model for the management of large-scale development projects in the State, such as in Akwa Ibom State, that requires all government agencies, stakeholders, and NGOs to work together and take coordinated actions.

c. Participatory or Co-Management Model

Participatory collaboration underlines shared decision-making and resource access by participants. The local people play an active role in designing, implementing, and monitoring projects, and also share projects with national bodies (Reed, 2008). In the design of schemes in CRBDA projects, limited beneficiaries are instrumental in ensuring outreach and acceptance, especially when irrigation facilities, fisheries marches, and water reticulation networks are concerned. This also increases effectiveness and efficiency measures because people become more informed about what they are fighting for.

d. Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Model

This is where public bodies and the private sector come together to formally work on a project combining resources, knowledge and best practice to achieve the project objectives (Hodge & Greve, 2007). In the Nigerian context, PPP can contribute to the CRBDA program by encouraging the participation of administrative authorities together with the private sector, where the management and development of the projects are concerned.

Review of Empirical Studies

One of the common factors that empirical studies highlight as critical to the successful implementation of projects in Nigeria is how stakeholders have been engaged. Adeniyi & Bayo (2018) said that there is a positive effect of stakeholder involvement in development projects and that such involvement was enhanced by the members of the communities of regular beneficiaries or development projects at earlier project stages. This extended to Dada (2016), who added that most people did not know when or how to engage local communities in development projects, so they often left them out altogether. Workshops, discussions, and feedback, it seems, involve the stakeholders and their roles, responsibilities and potential for enlarging the scope of implementation. The studies of water projects in the city also showed that the DPR extensively nurtured the use of policy-based forms of intervention, which address thin red lines of policy space in water resources provision, application, and consumption as important and beneficial equities. However, it remains to be seen that strategic social markets enable individuals to see such benefits as access to social services beyond their worth, and cascades are created. Balancing system-level efficiency for public age is another managerial challenge that productive triangulation of these aspects and competences appears to be.

Reed et al. (2009) focused on stakeholder analysis and engagement in project projects. It helped to address issues that may arise during sustainability and included the opinions and expertise of the local inhabitants in the governing process. Freeman (1984) observed that knowing who the important stakeholders are and how they are organised and given interests in the assessment of priorities, concludes that this approach is as important in the task accomplishment process as it is knowledgeable as it is effective. Chambers (1997) argued that well-executed projects encourage community participation and ensure that the intended outcomes are consistent with the needs and aspirations of the people. Research shows that Poor stakeholder participation in community irrigation projects led to low usage of schemes and, in turn, delayed completion of the projects (Ogbonna, 2015). Iwaoma et al. (2017) found that community mobilisation for flood control projects in the Niger Delta enhanced adoption and reduced conflict. Adejumo, et al. (2018) observed that implementing such programs led to enhanced direction of resources, engagement and sustainability.

Other studies of infrastructure confirm that the involvement of all stakeholders is a very important stage in the construction of any type of infrastructure. Akinwale (2016), for example, studied how co-operation between stakeholders in building a road impacts corruption and reported that it increased transparency while decreasing fraud. In their analysis of power projects, Musa & Ibrahim (2017) claim that consulting the public, among other measures, helped in downplaying resistance and conflict. Oladipo & Alade (2018) reported higher satisfaction in the communities when multiple stakeholders were consulted in the development of the cities. Consequently, the dimension of multi-stakeholder engagement in urban projects appeared to improve resource management and community contentment. Also, in the study of development projects, Olagunju et al. (2020) determined that stakeholder collaboration considerably contributes to the potential success of projects. Apart from that, Eze et al. (2019) found that more involvement of stakeholders in healthcare facilities also increases the quality of services and ensures that those involved are accountable to each other. Abubakar & Yusuf (2021) observed that

different methods of community engagement increased the popularity and longevity of self-help measures such as rural water projects.

Previous research has equally pointed out the dangers associated with insufficient engagement of stakeholders. Local people were not involved in development projects in Southeastern Nigeria, and as a consequence, there were problems, such as project slowdown, conflicts, and infrastructure development that was far below the capacity to utilise it. Aluko & Adetunji (2019) reported that the lack of community engagement in water supply projects resulted in poor operation and maintenance in the project area. Farmer involvement in irrigation schemes has been demonstrated to increase productivity and efficiency (Okeke & Nwachukwu, 2020). Contrary to this viewpoint, these studies clearly suggest the positive contribution of stakeholder engagement, especially consultation, collaboration, participatory planning and capacity building in project implementation. Indeed, the benefit that is associated with stakeholder involvement increases the willingness of stakeholders to get involved and also enhances risk management, minimises conflicts and subsequently, shapes the aspect of sustainability over the long run. However, these findings are confronted with another set of challenges, such as lack of effective coordination, streamlined financial support, socio-cultural norms, and poor provision of policy especially support – these are present problems, thereby dictating that even more strategies be made applicable to water resource management projects particularly the Cross River Basin Development Authority (CRBDA) projects in Akwa Ibom State.

Theoretical Framework

To give this report a scientific rationale, the stakeholder theory, participatory development theory and resource-dependency theory were utilised as the conceptual frameworks. The starting point for the understanding of the investigated problem is, first of all, stakeholder theory. It deals with the problems in the organisation of the socialistically oriented society by means of identifying social groups that are important for the development of the enterprise (Freeman, 1984). This theory argues that organisations should take into account the interests of all stakeholders, and not just the ones of shareholders withdrawing or giving money to the organization, to create and maintain positive change. In the aspect of development projects such as the one under consideration, the theory of stakeholders emphasises that the progress of the projects depends on the recognition, management and involvement of the stakeholders over the project life cycle (Mitchell et al., 1997).

The stakeholder theory identifies three main characteristics that define the importance of a stakeholder: power, legitimacy and urgency. Capacity, legitimacy, and urgency all have stakes based on which the final stakeholder identification can be done. Power refers to the ability of a stakeholder to affect the project, whereas legitimacy consists of whether the stakeholder belongs to the territory and whether it is proper to involve him. Urgency refers to how quickly action has to be taken in response to the theatre stakes that a stakeholder is raising claims over (Mitchell et al., 1997). The bottom line is that all CRBDA activities in the form of infrastructure projects at work, like unified management of water, flood control, dams, watersheds, and aquaculture development, require scientific stakeholder management, as such stakeholders' perceived power and how much traction their demands will have will certainly affect the performance of operations.

The inclusion of stakeholders in project development is closely related to participatory development theory, which is the basis of the stakeholder engagement framework. The possibility for influence on a particular project's planning and operations is the central issue in the participatory development context. This leads to the discussion of 'inclusion', which has to be holistically understood as constructive, strategic, and the conduct of strategic linkages between relevant sectors. This theoretical perspective advances the case where development interventions can be more effective, given that it factors in the capacities and capabilities of all individuals. In this sense, project sustainability is realised on the basis of the communities' ability to effectively participate in the planning, action, and evaluation aspects of the projects (Chambers, 1999). Passive or pre-separation stakeholder theory can be said to be one of the best descriptions of strategic interactions that seem to be helping in state-level actions; however, my understanding is that stakeholder relationships are more of an integral people-based process where empowerment is important.

For instance, rather than just designing irrigation schemes or other flood control structures which may require the expertise of people not familiar with the area's conditions or crops they grow, it would be wiser to involve the local people. In addition, firms that are expected to engage in CRBDA projects must comply with the development requirements of the contracting model. Those requirements DN promote the use of local knowledge and community support for water-related activities, limiting the levels of activities that can be embarked upon. With project implementers' clarity on such dependencies, there is room to strengthen co-operation, reduce the likelihood of failures, or enhance timeliness in goal realisation.

Exploring these paradigms deeply, it becomes evident that stakeholder theories contribute to the full understanding of stakeholder engagement in project implementation. Stakeholder theory explains why it is necessary to determine and group the stakeholders; participatory development theory sheds light on the processes and mechanisms of such engagement; and resource dependence theory pinpoints the importance of having a good relationship with stakeholders in the process of obtaining the availability of critical resources and advocacy. As a whole, these theories establish a potent set of assumptions one uses to view and deconstruct the factors which influence how and to what extent stakeholders partake in CRBDA projects in Akwa Ibom State.

Research Design

This paper highlights the clarity of work with descriptive design and a survey on stakeholders' engagement in the successful implementation of projects by Cross River Basin Development Authority (CRBDA) in Akwa Ibom Local. Descriptive design is appropriate, considering that it helps in-depth and orderly investigation of how stakeholder buy-in, backing, consultation and cooperation affect project outcomes. Surveys deal with perceptions, attitudes, and phenomena experienced by stakeholders in the implementation of CRBDA projects.

Such implementation also allows for no manipulations of variables as it is more focused on the patterns, trends and relationships within stakeholders' attitudes toward the issue under investigation, making it quite effective for analysis of survey data as well as that which had been collected earlier by CRBDA.

In researching stakeholder engagement practices, both primary and secondary data sources are employed. The use of primary data involves the administration of a structured questionnaire to designated stakeholders, which includes representatives of the local community, government officials, CRBDA project staff and development partners. Key issues here are stakeholder commitment, support, consultation, and cooperation, as well as sustainability brought on by a four-point Likert scale design. The latter is used once the primary data are collected, and such sources include the documented reports of the CRBDA, which consist of the official annual reports, outcomes of the specific projects, and other documents that are related to the previous and ongoing projects that concern the community. To gain further insights, a review is also conducted over certain government publications, providing an analysis of the system of water management, as well as how water-related activities fit in with construction activities, etc. There is also an extensive search for academic databases that will further explain factors that foster participation, ongoing management of projects and especially participatory development in Nigeria and other settings.

In this context, it was possible to work with a total of 251 participants from the population who are directly involved with projects and reside in Akwa Ibom State. The 251 people were divided into community-based organisation members and CRBDA's personnel. Owing to the manageable size of the target population, all the 251 respondents were approached, the goal being to ascertain that there is no case of non-represented stakeholders. To increase diversity and validity, cluster sampling is done where stakeholders are sampled based on various attributes, otherwise called purposive sampling, which is utilised to sample significant stakeholders for purposes of planning and decision-making, while in simple random sampling, respondents are drawn from within the clusters. Descriptive statistics are used to summarise and assess the various trends and patterns, and the chi-square (χ^2) test is used to test the relationship between stakeholder engagement and project results such as cooperation, communication and involvement. It enables the researcher to take a 3-pronged view of the behaviour of stakeholders and the impact of the behaviour on the effectiveness of projects by allowing them to accommodate both explanatory discipline and other qualitative or quantitative methods; also, effective value addition is brought to the entire research process.

Projects Executed by the Cross River Basin Development Authority (CRBDA) in Akwa Ibom State and Cross River State

The CRBDA has successfully implemented some projects in some selected areas of Cross River and Akwa Ibom States:

Table 1: Cross River Basin Development Authority (CRBA) – Infrastructure Projects

S/N	Project Title	Contractor	Contractor Address	Contract Duration	Location	LGA	State
1	Continuation of Works on the Construction of Erosion	Messrs Teckquick Nigeria Limited	No. 118 White House Street, Calabar	3 Months	Ikot Inuen-Ikot Asat	Etinan	Akwa Ibom

S/N	Project Title	Contractor	Contractor Address	Contract Duration	Location	LGA	State
	and Flood Control Works				Road, Ekom Iman		State
2	Continuation of Works on the Construction of Farm Evacuation Road	Messrs Royal Touch Technology Limited	No. 85 Ndidem Usang Iso Road, Calabar	3 Months	Edet Archibong Eto Mkpe	Akpabuyo	Cross River State
3	Construction of Itigidi Irrigation Project	Messrs Andek Resources Nigeria Limited	No. 65 Obubu Road, Ikom	3 Months	Itigidi	Abi	Akwa Ibom State
4	Construction of Borehole at Afrike	Messrs Chrisjames-Jeri Ventures	No. 1 Ikot Osukpong Road, Ibiono, Akwa Ibom State	3 Months	Afrike	Bekwarra	Cross River State
5	Rehabilitation and Construction of Water Schemes in Cross River & Akwa Ibom States	Messrs KPMGDD Service Limited	No. 8 Nsikak Eduok Avenue, Uyo	3 Months	Ikot Ekwere	Nsit Ubim	Akwa Ibom State
6	Reclamation of Ikot Ntung Irrigation Project	Messrs Jadubak Nigeria Limited	D33 Efab Mall Ext., Area II, Abuja	3 Months	Nsit Ubium	Nsit Ubium	Akwa Ibom State
7	Construction of Water Schemes in Six Locations in Akwa Ibom	Messrs Geo-Resm Construction Limited	No. Plot 15 Block in Marian Boulevard, Calabar	3 Months	Ikot Ede	Ikono	Akwa Ibom State
8	Continuation of Works on the Construction of Basin Town Erosion Control Works	Messrs Dutina Nigeria Limited	No. 5 Mathias Ohe Avenue, Calabar	3 Months	Basin Town	Calabar Municipal	Cross River State
9	Continuation of Works on Rehabilitation of Dam	Messrs CYMB Integrated Services Limited	No. 5J.J Edem Street, Oron, Akwa Ibom State	3 Months	Ibiono Ibom Dam	Ibinon	Akwa Ibom State
10	Rehabilitation of Water Supply Projects within the UNICAL Community	Messrs Jaysbery Nig. Limited	No. 10 Obot Street, Off Atekong Street, Calabar	3 Months	UNICAL, Calabar	Calabar Municipal	Cross River State
11	Continuation of Works on the Construction of Erosion Control Project	Messrs Macado Mould Engineering Limited	No. 43 Ekpo Abasi Street, Calabar	3 Months	Odohget-Etara/Ekuri Road	Obubra	Cross River State
12	Provision of Water Scheme	Messrs Akpaven Integrated Services Limited	No. 5 Mathias Ohe Avenue, Calabar	3 Months	Andem Itam	Itu	Akwa Ibom State
13	Provision of ODF Facilities for Farmers	Messrs J4 Brothers Global Limited	No. 47A Ikot Okoro Road, Abak	3 Months	Nsit Ubim	Nsit Ubim	Akwa Ibom State

Source: Cross River Basin Development Authority (2025)

Data Analyses and Testing of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One: Poor Collaboration and Partnership in Project Implementation Outcomes (CRBDA, Akwa Ibom State)

No.	Statement	A	SA	D	SD	Total
1	Poor collaboration among stakeholders does not enhance partnership effectiveness in project implementation in Cross River Basin Development Authority in Akwa Ibom State.	100	120	20	11	251
2	Inadequate joint decision-making with stakeholders in the Cross River Basin Development Authority in Akwa Ibom State does not improve project completion timelines.	95	115	25	16	251
3	Poor collaboration increases conflicts between government agencies and local communities in Cross River Basin Development Authority in Akwa Ibom State.	98	110	25	18	251
4	Lack of partnership with community groups does not ensure better project planning and resource allocation in Cross River Basin Development Authority in Akwa Ibom State.	97	112	22	20	251
5	Absence of collaborative meetings and workshops reduces understanding of project objectives among stakeholders in Cross River Basin Development Authority in Akwa Ibom State.	96	113	23	19	251
6	Stakeholders who do not collaborate are less likely to support the sustainability of projects in Cross River Basin Development Authority in Akwa Ibom State.	99	110	25	17	251
7	Lack of continuous collaboration weakens trust and transparency in project implementation in Cross River Basin Development Authority in Akwa Ibom State.	101	108	26	16	251

Table 2: Chi-square Computation for Poor Collaboration and Partnership in CRBDA, Akwa Ibom State)

Statement	Response	Observed (O)	Expected (E)	$(O-E)^2 / E$	Subtotal χ^2
1	A	100	97.97	0.042	
1	SA	120	112.53	0.496	
1	D	20	23.74	0.589	
1	SD	11	16.72	1.956	3.083
2	A	95	97.97	0.090	
2	SA	115	112.53	0.056	
2	D	25	23.74	0.064	
2	SD	16	16.72	0.031	0.241
3	A	98	97.97	0.0001	
3	SA	110	112.53	0.056	
3	D	25	23.74	0.064	

Statement	Response	Observed (O)	Expected (E)	(O-E) ² / E	Subtotal χ^2
3	SD	18	16.72	0.094	0.214
4	A	97	97.97	0.010	
4	SA	112	112.53	0.003	
4	D	22	23.74	0.138	
4	SD	20	16.72	0.656	0.807
5	A	96	97.97	0.039	
5	SA	113	112.53	0.003	
5	D	23	23.74	0.023	
5	SD	19	16.72	0.300	0.365
6	A	99	97.97	0.010	
6	SA	110	112.53	0.056	
6	D	25	23.74	0.064	
6	SD	17	16.72	0.005	0.135
7	A	101	97.97	0.092	
7	SA	108	112.53	0.184	
7	D	26	23.74	0.203	
7	SD	16	16.72	0.031	0.510

Step 7: Total Chi-square

$$\chi^2 = 3.083 + 0.241 + 0.214 + 0.807 + 0.365 + 0.135 + 0.510 = 5.355$$

Degrees of freedom: (df = (7-1)x(4-1) = 18)

Critical value ($\alpha=0.05$) $\approx$ 28.869

$\chi^2 = 5.355 < 28.869 \rightarrow$ Not significant

Interpretation

The responses from the stakeholders on the side of inadequate collaboration and partnership underperformance have been marked as an obstacle in the implementation of development projects by the Cross River Basin Development Authority (CRBDA) in Akwa Ibom State. Those surveyed stressed that lack of involvement, unequal power dynamics and poor relations patterns did not result in successful implementation of the projects. This is echoed even further by Bourne (2015), who explained that the more a project's stakeholders are excluded from decision making, the more it is open to misunderstandings, confrontations and attitudes of opposition, hence the high chances of project failure. Bryson et

al. (2015), on the other hand, hold that ineffective collaboration and partnerships spike inefficiency, promotes project losses and postpone the realisation of those outcomes in the project.

Table 3: Inadequate Stakeholder Commitment and Support in Project Effectiveness (CRBDA, Akwa Ibom State)

No.	Statement	A	SA	D	SD	Total
8	Stakeholder commitment does not ensure that resources are efficiently allocated in projects in Cross River Basin Development Authority in Akwa Ibom State.	100	120	20	11	251
9	Lack of active support from local communities reduces adoption of project outcomes in Cross River Basin Development Authority in Akwa Ibom State.	98	115	23	15	251
10	Weak stakeholder commitment reduces accountability in project execution in Cross River Basin Development Authority in Akwa Ibom State.	99	112	25	15	251
11	The effectiveness of project monitoring is not supported when stakeholders do not provide adequate support to the Cross River Basin Development Authority in Akwa Ibom State.	97	113	24	17	251
12	Projects with uncommitted stakeholders are more prone to delays and implementation challenges in Cross River Basin Development Authority in Akwa Ibom State.	96	114	23	18	251
13	Lack of stakeholder support discourages participation in decision-making and project evaluation in Cross River Basin Development Authority in Akwa Ibom State.	98	110	25	18	251
14	The long-term sustainability of CRBDA projects is weakened by low stakeholder commitment and support in Cross River Basin Development Authority in Akwa Ibom State.	101	108	24	18	251

Table 4: Chi-square Computation (Statement 8)

Statement		Response	Observed (O)		Expected (E)	(O–E) ² / E
8		A	100		97.97	0.042
8		SA	120		112.53	0.496
8		D	20		23.74	0.589
8		SD	11		16.72	1.956
Subtotal Statement 8						3.083
Statement	Response	Observed (O)		Expected (E)	(O–E) ² / E	Subtotal
9	A	98		97.97	0.0001	
9	SA	115		112.53	0.055	
9	D	23		23.74	0.023	
9	SD	15		16.72	0.177	0.255
10	A	99		97.97	0.010	
10	SA	112		112.53	0.003	
10	D	25		23.74	0.064	
10	SD	15		16.72	0.167	0.244
11	A	97		97.97	0.010	
11	SA	113		112.53	0.002	
11	D	24		23.74	0.003	

Statement		Response	Observed (O)	Expected (E)	$(O-E)^2 / E$
11	SD	17	16.72	0.005	0.020
12	A	96	97.97	0.039	
12	SA	114	112.53	0.018	
12	D	23	23.74	0.024	
12	SD	18	16.72	0.094	0.175
13	A	98	97.97	0.0001	
13	SA	110	112.53	0.056	
13	D	25	23.74	0.064	
13	SD	18	16.72	0.094	0.214
14	A	101	97.97	0.092	
14	SA	108	112.53	0.184	
14	D	24	23.74	0.003	
14	SD	18	16.72	0.094	0.373

Step 4: Total Chi-square for Table 2

χ^2 total = 3.083 + 0.255 + 0.244 + 0.020 + 0.175 + 0.214 + 0.373 = 4.364

Degrees of freedom: (df = (7-1) x (4-1) = 18)

Critical value ($\alpha=0.05$, df=18) $\approx$ 28.869

Interpretation

The χ^2 results ($\chi^2 = 4.364 < 28.869$) disclose that the lack of joint effort of the stakeholders and inadequate support hinders the implementation of projects by the Cross River Basin Development Authority (CRBDA) in Akwa Ibom State. Pretty much, this behaviour of stakeholders not helping in project activities, whether through knowledge, time or finances, would equally mean that more adversities would be experienced during project execution, hence preventing, obstructing or causing delays, poor task premises and resources mismanagement leading to poor outcome accountability mechanisms. This claim supports that of Bourne (2015), who emphasised the impact of stakeholders towards change and blamed the lack of commitment as one of the major causes of the inability of the project to achieve its set goals. Bryson et al. (2015) equally affirm that stakeholder refusal to extend support leads to undermining accountability as well as the practice and sustainability of making decisions anticipated to bring changes. In the course of implementation of projects under the CRBDA, scant involvement by the stakeholders has, in particular, increased the difficulties that might have been reduced, thanks to the local knowhow and coordination as sources of development as opposed to high impact.

This view is further strengthened by research by Okolie et al. (2018), who assert that the lack of stakeholder engagement, even though the governance framework exists, leads to threats to project integrity and efficiency. This makes it necessary for CRBDA to enhance stakeholder involvement so as to counter such adverse viewpoints and better deliver the infrastructure on the ground.

Conclusion

A conclusion can be derived from the outcomes of the survey that poor cooperation, feeble partnerships, and the lack of stakeholders' active participation are very harmful hindrances in the case of the Cross River Basin Development Authority in Akwa Ibom, as far as project implementation is concerned. The lack of willingness of the stakeholders to conduct public consultations on the projects, the exclusion of the people from the decision-making processes concerning the projects and the lack of supportive tools in the project area are causes of the breach in the execution of these facilities. Stakeholder feedback in practices in the CRBDA regards the failure on the part of the Authority to meet the expectations of the stakeholders, and their level of involvement in the progress has not been able to serve as a valid excuse for the failure of the Authority to adopt appropriate mechanisms for participation, communication and cooperative planning among government units, local governments and other concerned actors at some point. This results in delays in the rollout of the project, conflicts, unnecessary expenditure of funds, and poor control in the management of financial disbursements. Still, failing to meaningfully involve stakeholders can lead to the inability to achieve the outcomes of the project, as many stakeholders are not into how decisions are made. This is associated with poor trust within the society, which creates problems for the Authority in its pursuit of set objectives. There are numerous reasons why this problem is particular to Akwa Ibom at the same time as underlining the need for adequate consultation and strengthening of stakeholder involvement.

Recommendations

i. Strengthen Stakeholder Collaboration and Partnership Structures

CRBDA should create formal structures that make collaboration among stakeholders, including regular creation of joint strategic plans, inter-agency meetings and community consultations.

ii. Stakeholder Commitment and Support

To address low commitment and insufficient support, stakeholders should work towards objective-setting, develop reward schemes, and clarify the boundaries of roles. Incentivising the stakeholders with real hope of progress and continuous reports on the progress can grow the sense of undertaking, responsibility and continued participation in the entire length of the project implementation.

iii. Put in Place Feedback and Continuous Engagement Strategies

CRBDA would do well to incorporate mechanisms for continuous dialogue and monitoring stakeholder perceptions, expectations and experiences throughout the project execution. Tools such as surveys, town hall meetings, and digital platforms for reporting issues can help in early identification of obstacles and hence allow strategies to be adjusted accordingly. This will help in ensuring a proper and sustainable realisation of the project as any discrepancies between the project goals and stakeholder expectations are kept at a minimum.

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