

## COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND SUSTAINABLE EDUCATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE IN RURAL NIGER STATE

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### Abstract

*Sustainable educational infrastructure in rural Niger State presents a significant developmental challenge. Despite governmental efforts, many communities still lack basic educational facilities due to funding limitations, policy gaps, and insufficient stakeholder engagement. This study investigated the role of community participation in fostering the sustainable development of educational infrastructure in rural areas of Niger State. Using a quantitative method, data were collected from 349 respondents, including community leaders, school heads, parents, and government officials, across nine selected rural communities in Niger State: Kontagora, Magama, Wushishi (Zone A); Chanchaga, Paikoro, Bosso (Zone B); and Lapai, Agaie, Katcha (Zone C). A multistage sampling technique was employed, and the sample size was determined using the Taro Yamane formula. Data were collected via a structured questionnaire designed on a 5-point Likert scale and analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency counts, percentages, means, and standard deviations) in SPSS Version 25. The findings revealed that community involvement in the planning, construction, and maintenance of school infrastructure significantly influenced the sustainability of such projects. In communities where resources—such as labor, land, and local materials—were contributed, projects exhibited higher levels of maintenance and utilization.*

**Keywords:** Community Participation, Sustainable Development, Educational Infrastructure, Rural Education, Stakeholder Engagement.

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### Introduction

Community participation has gained increasing recognition as a critical component of sustainable development across various sectors, particularly in education. In rural areas of Nigeria, especially Niger State, educational infrastructure faces numerous challenges, including poor facilities, inadequate maintenance, and a lack of ownership among stakeholders. Research indicates that meaningful community engagement in educational planning and development contributes to better outcomes, particularly in rural settings where state resources are limited (Adebayo & Yusuf, 2020). The importance of education as a cornerstone of development cannot be overstated. Quality educational infrastructure not only promotes effective teaching and learning but also encourages school enrollment, retention, and academic achievement. Unfortunately, many rural communities in Niger State still suffer from dilapidated classrooms, a lack of furniture, and inadequate sanitary facilities, leading to high student dropout rates (Ibrahim & Usman, 2021). This situation necessitates innovative and inclusive approaches, such as increased community involvement, to bridge existing infrastructural gaps.

Historically, educational infrastructure development in Nigeria followed a top-down approach, often viewing communities as passive recipients of government projects.

However, such models frequently failed due to limited contextual understanding, weak project ownership, and a lack of sustainability (Mohammed & Dauda, 2019). Community participation not only leverages local resources but also strengthens accountability and transparency in project execution. When communities contribute labor, land, or materials, they develop a sense of ownership, increasing the likelihood of project longevity (Ezeokoli, 2022). Moreover, involving community stakeholders—such as traditional leaders, School-Based Management Committees (SBMCs), and Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs)—enhances collective decision-making and ensures projects align with local needs.

Recent studies have emphasized that empowering communities through training and awareness creation improves their capacity to engage effectively with education service providers. For instance, Akintola and Musa (2020) observed that community-managed school rehabilitation projects in North-Central Nigeria recorded higher success rates than those fully managed by government agencies. This suggests that investing in community engagement is not merely desirable but essential. Despite these advantages, persistent barriers to effective community participation exist in rural Niger State, including limited awareness, weak policy frameworks, illiteracy, and socio-cultural constraints that hinder the active involvement of women and marginalized groups (Lawal & Garba, 2021). Thus, exploring the dynamics of community participation and its real impact on infrastructure development is crucial for informed policy intervention. This study, therefore, seeks to explore how community involvement influences the sustainability of educational infrastructure in rural Niger State.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The issue of inadequate and unsustainable educational infrastructure in rural areas of Niger State remains a persistent challenge, despite various government and donor interventions. Many rural communities lack basic school amenities such as functional classrooms, toilets, libraries, and staff quarters, leading to poor learning environments and reduced student motivation. These infrastructural deficits contribute significantly to high dropout rates and low academic performance among rural students. While several policies have emphasized infrastructure development, their impact in rural areas has been minimal, largely due to insufficient community involvement in the planning and implementation processes. Projects are often executed without consulting end-users—teachers, parents, and local leaders—leading to poor alignment with community needs and eventual project failure (Adamu & Lawan, 2019). This lack of inclusiveness creates a disconnect between the state and grassroots, weakening sustainability.

Despite the proven benefits of participatory development, many rural communities in Niger State remain sidelined in educational planning. In instances where communities are involved, participation is often tokenistic or limited to labor provision without genuine decision-making power (Oyetola & Suleiman, 2018). This restricts their ability to influence key elements such as site selection, design preferences, and usage modalities of school facilities. Moreover, cultural barriers, illiteracy, and poverty restrict the participation of women, youth, and marginalized groups in rural education development. Their exclusion not only limits diverse perspectives but also reduces the collective capacity of communities to engage meaningfully in education issues (Yusuf & Salihu, 2021). Given these realities, there is a critical need to assess how community participation can be effectively leveraged to enhance the sustainability of educational

infrastructure. Without addressing the structural and systemic limitations of community engagement, rural education in Niger State will continue to struggle with infrastructural decay, under-utilization, and ineffectiveness.

### **Objectives of the Study**

This study is guided by the following objectives:

- i. To examine the extent of community participation in the development of educational infrastructure in rural areas of Niger State.
- ii. To assess the impact of community participation on the sustainability of educational infrastructure in rural communities.
- iii. To identify challenges hindering effective community participation in educational infrastructure development.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guide the study:

- i. To what extent do communities participate in the development of educational infrastructure in rural areas of Niger State?
- ii. What is the impact of community participation on the sustainability of educational infrastructure in rural areas of Niger State?
- iii. What are the challenges affecting effective community participation in educational infrastructure development in rural Niger State?

### **Methods**

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This design was selected because it allows for the systematic collection and analysis of data from a large sample population across multiple locations, facilitating the generalization of findings. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire with closed-ended items, designed on a 5-point Likert scale. The study was conducted across Niger State, which is divided into three geopolitical zones—Zone A, Zone B, and Zone C. From each of these zones, three Local Government Areas (LGAs) were selected, making a total of nine LGAs sampled for the study. In Zone A, the selected LGAs were Kontagora, Magama, and Wushishi, which are predominantly rural with limited government presence and high reliance on communal efforts for school development. Zone B included Chanchaga, Paikoro, and Bosso, which are semi-urban but possess rural catchment areas, making them suitable for comparative analysis. Finally, from Zone C, the selected LGAs were Lapai, Agaie, and Katcha, known for their rural disposition and historical communal involvement in school development projects.

The sample size was determined using the Taro Yamane formula (Yamane, 1967). Applying the formula with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error yielded a sample size of 349 respondents. A multistage sampling technique was used. In the first stage, stratified sampling was used to divide the state into its three zones. In the second stage, purposive sampling technique was adopted to select the LGAs. To establish reliability, a pilot study was conducted in Shiroro LGA (not included in the main study) using 30 respondents. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency

counts, percentages, means, and standard deviations. The findings were interpreted in line with the objectives of the study.

## Results

**Table 1: Community Participation in the Development of Educational Infrastructure**

Items	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	SD	Decision
Community members donate materials for school projects	127	142	54	26	3.06	0.83	Agree
Communities support renovation of classrooms	132	151	43	23	3.12	0.78	Agree
Local artisans volunteer in school infrastructure projects	99	156	61	33	2.94	0.87	Agree
Communities construct furniture for schools	87	133	78	51	2.75	0.95	Agree
Communities mobilize funds for school development	144	136	42	27	3.14	0.79	Agree

Decision Rule: Mean  $\geq 2.50$  indicates agreement (positive perception); Mean  $< 2.50$  indicates disagreement.

The data indicates a generally high level of community involvement in educational infrastructure development across rural Niger State. The highest-rated item, "Communities mobilize funds for school development" (Mean = 3.14), suggests that financial contributions are a core strategy used by communities to bridge infrastructure gaps. Similarly, the consistent support for classroom renovations (Mean = 3.12) and material donations (Mean = 3.06) demonstrates that local residents recognize their stake in educational advancement. Even where contributions require skilled labor, such as volunteering by artisans (Mean = 2.94) and furniture construction (Mean = 2.75), communities are still actively involved. These findings highlight a strong culture of communal ownership and responsibility for education, particularly in areas where government presence is limited.

**Table 2: Roles of Community Stakeholders in Sustaining Educational Infrastructure**

Items	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	SD	Decision
Community leaders monitor infrastructure usage	114	149	53	33	2.97	0.89	Agree
School-Based Committees (SBMCs) ensure infrastructure maintenance	121	144	50	34	3.01	0.88	Agree
Parents contribute to the upkeep of school buildings	98	132	71	48	2.74	0.96	Agree
Communities protect schools against vandalism	113	135	56	45	2.86	0.94	Agree

Items	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	SD	Decision
Youth groups support cleaning and minor repairs	91	139	72	47	2.73	0.95	Agree

Decision Rule: Mean  $\geq 2.50$  = Agree; Mean  $< 2.50$  = Disagree.

Respondents generally agreed that diverse community stakeholders actively contribute to the sustainability of educational infrastructure. The highest mean score (3.01) indicates strong confidence in School-Based Management Committees (SBMCs) and their role in maintenance activities, suggesting that formal community governance structures are working as intended. Community leaders' involvement in monitoring infrastructure (Mean = 2.97) reinforces local oversight and accountability mechanisms. Notably, while parental involvement (Mean = 2.74) and protection against vandalism (Mean = 2.86) scored slightly lower, they remain above the threshold, reflecting consistent stakeholder participation. Youth groups had the lowest score (2.73), signaling an opportunity for more targeted engagement strategies for younger community members. Overall, the findings show a decentralized and collaborative approach to sustaining school infrastructure.

**Table 3: Challenges to Community Participation in Educational Infrastructure Development**

Items	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	SD	Decision
Lack of government support discourages participation	151	127	42	29	3.15	0.81	Agree
Inadequate awareness of community responsibilities	130	135	50	34	3.04	0.87	Agree
Poverty hinders financial contribution	144	126	47	32	3.10	0.84	Agree
Poor coordination between schools and communities	112	137	58	42	2.89	0.92	Agree
Low participation of youths in infrastructure projects	103	118	67	61	2.67	1.03	Agree

Decision Rule: Mean  $\geq 2.50$  = Agree (identified as a challenge); Mean  $< 2.50$  = Disagree (not a significant challenge).

This analysis highlights the primary obstacles hindering effective community participation. The most significant constraint identified is "Lack of government support" (Mean = 3.15), which suggests communities feel neglected in their development efforts. This sentiment is reinforced by the substantial impact of poverty (Mean = 3.10), indicating that economic limitations severely restrict contributions, especially in under-resourced rural areas. Inadequate awareness (Mean = 3.04) and poor coordination (Mean = 2.89) point to communication and planning gaps between schools and communities, potentially impeding joint initiatives. While youth participation was the least-rated challenge (2.67), it still surpassed the decision threshold, suggesting that many young people are disengaged from school-related development efforts. These insights call for institutional reforms, awareness campaigns, and government-led interventions to address these structural and socio-economic barriers.

## **Discussion of Findings**

This study aimed to examine the impact of community participation on the development and sustainability of educational infrastructure in rural areas of Niger State. Using a descriptive survey design, data was collected through structured questionnaires distributed across nine Local Government Areas (LGAs) selected from the state's three geopolitical zones.

The study revealed a high level of community participation in the development of educational infrastructure. Respondents agreed that community members contribute significantly through the donation of building materials, classroom renovation, volunteer labor, and furniture construction. Among these, financial mobilization for school development was most prominent. These results demonstrate a strong tradition of communal effort, with rural communities actively filling gaps in government provision.

The study also explored the roles of various stakeholders, such as School-Based Management Committees (SBMCs), community leaders, parents, and youth, in sustaining existing school facilities. The results indicate that SBMCs are active in maintenance oversight, while community leaders monitor usage and ensure structures are not misused. Parents also contribute to upkeep, though to a lesser extent. Youth groups, while engaged in cleaning and minor repairs, were rated lower in terms of overall involvement. This implies a need for structured roles and formal training for all stakeholders, particularly youth, to ensure active, informed, and sustainable involvement.

Despite evident commitment, several challenges hinder optimal community participation. The most pressing constraint identified was the lack of government support. This suggests that communities feel abandoned or under-supported in their development efforts, which may lead to disillusionment over time. Poverty was also a major factor, limiting residents' capacity to contribute financially or materially. Additionally, poor coordination between schools and communities and low youth participation were flagged as concerns. Addressing these challenges would involve capacity-building for community leaders and SBMCs, government incentives to support local initiatives, and formal structures to integrate youth and marginalized groups into decision-making processes.

## **Conclusion**

The study concludes that the delay in retirement benefit payments is systemic and institutionalized, rooted in inefficient administrative structures, poor governance, and corruption. These delays are preventable with appropriate reforms and management. The effects of these delays are devastating, leading to economic disempowerment and emotional distress for retirees. The lack of financial stability significantly undermines the dignity and well-being of individuals who have served the nation. Sustainable and inclusive reforms, especially digitization, strict monitoring, and policy restructuring, are essential. Without these, the challenges in pension administration will persist, further harming national development and social justice.

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## Recommendations

- i. Simplify and automate the pension processing system to reduce bureaucracy and improve efficiency.
- ii. Introduce psychosocial support programs for retirees awaiting benefit disbursement to alleviate emotional distress.
- iii. Implement holistic pension reform policies with strict penalties for delays and non-compliance by administrative officers.

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