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Development without the Communities: Assessing Constituency Projects in the Niger Delta Region

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Abstract

Development planning in Nigeria has a long history of top-down planning, inherited from the colonial regime. This planning approach has oftentimes neglected the grassroots, whom development is intended for, in the planning and implementation of these projects. This approach to planning has affected government efforts negatively in addressing underdevelopment at the grassroots. Hence, the introduction of the constituency project is seen as a departure from past approaches as it addresses the community's challenges with the community involved. Using a qualitative case study design, that involved one focus group discussion with five persons and three key informant interviews with MDA's representatives and the House of representative member, alongside five community representatives to assess constituency projects (CPs) in Ughelli/Udi federal constituency of Delta State and found out that, like the previous efforts of the government, current efforts have also remained top-down, including CPs, which are premised on addressing community development with the communities, fully involved at all stages of their development. Using Arnstein's ladder of participation as the theoretical foundation, the findings from the study showed that CP's have remained top-down, with little or no genuine efforts to involve the grassroots communities in the process of their development. Findings from the research suggest the lack of genuine participation of the grassroots can be enhanced with the enactment of the CP Act, which will establish the institutional framework for genuine community participation.

Keywords: Development planning, community participation, top-down, bottom-up, constituency project

1.0 Introduction

Community participation in development planning is a common practice in development projects across the world, and it improves the chances of project success and community ownership of development projects (Aga et al. 2017; Madajewicz, et al. 2014; Riddell, 2013; Mansuri & Rao, 2004; Monaledi, 2016). Thus, community development is achieved with increased participation of the communities in their project planning and their involvement. More so, Zayyanu (2016) asserts that community participation in their problem-solving processes has been seen to improve the success rate of development projects where they are pursued. Consequently, this belief has spurred the participation of communities in their projects across the world. In Nigeria, for example, the outset of the fourth republic in 1999 led to heightened hope for community participation in politics and other aspects of governance (Obi, 2014; Fasakin, 2015). This is premised on the saying that "democracy is the government of the

people for the people and by the people," which suggests the important role of citizens in their affairs at all levels of governance.

However, in years gone by, Nigeria under the military regimes had eliminated avenues for community participation, particularly in areas of service delivery and development (Duruji & Duriji-Moses, 2017). This has led to a citizen disconnect in governance, which is the result of the monumental infrastructural gap across the country. More glaring is the poor state of development in the Niger Delta Region (NDR) (Ikenga et al, 2022; Jack-Ahigbe, 2013; Sampson & Okechukwu, 2022), including the several environmental challenges that have impacted the health and food security of the people residing in the oil exploring communities (Chijioke et al., 2018; Elum et al., 2022).

This challenge remains in the NDR is the region, even though crude oil is extracted, whose revenue the country relies upon for development (Babalola, 2014). While several efforts have been put in place at different levels of government to address the lack of development in the NDR, it appears they have not been successful, as they exhibit exclusion tendencies associated with the top-down approach to planning (Jack-Ahigbe, 2013).

In the face of the above scenario, a new approach was needed to alleviate the challenges of development; hence, Constituency Projects (CPs), also called Zonal Intervention Projects (ZIP), were introduced in 1999 with the legislators' involvement as a development intervention policy to provide projects and programmes that address the challenges of development across legislative constituencies in the country (Gbajamila, 2014), including the NDR.

Despite this, the premise of CPs has remained a mirage, given the poor level of grassroots participation in decision making and implementation. More so, it is argued that the participation of the community in their development initiatives is a factor of its success (Aga, e al., 2017). Public involvement, according to the International Association for Public involvement (IAPP), is a technique for collaboratively solving problems in order to get better and more sincere decisions (2014). Given its role in alleviating poverty and the overall management of underdevelopment issues, CPs in Nigeria and indeed in Ughelli/Udi federal constituency have fallen short of this promise because a select few control development planning, including the CPs' decision-making, implementation, and operations, which continues to affect negatively the constituents (Damarest, 2022).

However, the proponents of the CPs have argued that CPs are a break-away from past top-down intervention in addressing local development challenges with the legislators, who are closer to their communities than the other arms of government—executives and judiciary, hence, understand the community's needs better and thus better placed to address the community's challenges (Gbajamila, 2014). Accordingly, in solving these needs, the communities need to be involved in all stages of the project process of addressing their development, since, CPs' eliminates the bureaucratic red tape associated with past approaches that have in the past hampered project execution delays, resulting to their failure.

Although CPs are replete in controversy, they have remained a consistent feature of development planning in Nigeria and across the states, as a development tool, many have however dismissed the concept as an avenue for corruption (Sam et al., 2017). It is alleged that legislators dominate and exert considerable control on CPs decision-making, implementation and operations, neglecting the communities (ibid). Additionally, research has also shown that when communities are involved, the success of projects and programmes is enhanced, creating a win-win situation. Therefore, the primary objective of this study is to assess the participation of the constituents in Ughelli/Udi federal constituency of Delta state in CPs' as a people-directed policy for addressing underdevelopment.

2.0 Conceptual clarification and Literature review

2.1 Development planning

Development is a necessary component of human existence, and for the desired level of development to be achieved, development needs to be planned. Hence, the concept of development planning requires deconstructing the concepts and explaining each independently at the outset for clarity. In view of this Cole (1993:109) defined planning as an activity, which involves decisions about ends, means, conduct as well as result. According to Ujo (1994:157, citing Koontz, 1980) it was deciding in advance what to do, how to do it, when to do it and who is to do it. Similarly, Bromley (2009) also sees planning to concern the defining, achieving objectives and the process set out to achieve them, so that, the changes occurring in particular societies and nations are not determined simply by fortuitous or external circumstances, but through the purposive decisions, and actions of some or all of their inhabitants. Therefore, planning is the collection of strategies that communities put together, with greater determination towards actualizing the objectives set out at outset.

Development is a broad and contentious concept, which means different things to different people (Thomas, 2000; Astle, 2009). Development is basically an attempt to improve conditions for a society to progress (Chambers, 2004:2). Astle further points to the political, economic, social and human dimension development, making it convenient to see it from the position of interest. However, Todaro argues that development is about the people and goes on to conceptualised development as “a multidimensional process involving major changes in social structures, popular attitudes, and national institutions, as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality, and eradication of absolute poverty” (2000: 85). Allen and Thomas (2000:24) also see development as a holistic change that goes beyond improvement, not only in one aspect but, in the wider environment or society. Following from the above, Astle (2009: 13) Posed, “What is development?” Defining development for him and providing a satisfactory answer is quite a challenge. This, therefore, highlights some of the contentions of defining development.

Although, development, can be seen as a process, a condition or a combination of both (Astle, 2009). As a process, development according to Astle (2009) creates the improvement in the condition of the people in an area, making it be referred to as ‘developed’, while the area not affected by the improvement

process is referred to as 'less developed'. Buckland (1998) see development as a process that permits citizens and communities subdued, to achieve greater self-reliance in meeting their human needs, via enhanced capability brought by economic, social and, or political change. However, achieving self-reliance may be difficult to achieve, especially, where the foundation for attaining it is denied through unequal social relations.

2.2 *Constituency projects*

A constituency is a community or geographical area represented by an officeholder. It is a community whose electorates send a representative to a national, state, or local assembly to represent them. The constituency is a government electoral district; in other words, it is an area that has been divided for the purpose of elections and from which a legislative member is elected to serve in a parliament (Benjamin, 2014). The constituencies are the product of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Section 71 of the constitution provides that the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) delineate each state of the federation into three districts for the election of senators, constituting 109 across the country (www.nationalassembly.gov.ng). Furthermore, subject to the provision of Section 49 of the Constitution, INEC is to further delineate the country into 360 federal constituencies for the election into the office of the House of Representatives (Goitan, 2017; Benjamin, 2014), with population index considered as the major factor.

Constituency Projects (CPs), often known as Zonal Intervention Projects (ZIP) in Nigeria, are also commonly referred to as Constituency Development Funds (CDF) worldwide. Although in the US, its equivalent is referred to as the pork barrel. CPs' are innovative strategy for resource devolution to achieve uniform development by providing local infrastructure across electoral constituencies (Ngacho & Das, 2014; Udefuna et al. 2013). Others see it as fiscal decentralisation, in which the central government collects mandated money and distributes it to the general populace (Gathoni & Ngugi, 2016; Smoke, 2015). Irrespective, CPs have become an important theme for governments in many developing countries in recent years (Fjeldstad, working paper, 2001; Zyl, 2011; Barkan & Mattes, 2013; Baskin et al. 2010). CPs are used for local public utilities, such as building public restrooms or dip tanks, repairing bridges, grading roads, renovating school buildings, and working on water projects (Harris & Posner, 2013), aimed at eradicating poverty, distributing resources, and promoting public participation (Gathoni, Julian & Ngugi, 2016). Countries like Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia, Southern Sudan, Zimbabwe, Nepal, Bangladesh, Ghana, India, Jamaica, Malawi, Nigeria, the Philippines, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands—have recently implemented CPs in one form or another (Zyl, 2010; Murray, 2011; Tsubura, 2013; Ngacho & Das, 2014). However, in the United States of America (US), what is known as the "pork barrel" is a variant of the CDF (Baskin, 2010; CID, 2009; IBP, 2010; Zyl, 2011).

2.3 *Community participation*

The involvement of the community in one or more phases of development phases is what is referred to as participation (Bolgherini, 2010). Community involvement is public participation-oriented development

that incorporates a perspective that views the community as a subject, not as the object of development (Rirituningsia, 2017). Hence the participation of the community in any development initiative is sacrosanct to the achievement of the objective of the development. Studies have argued that communities normally bring with them local knowledge in the development process as a crucial factor to its success (Bernan, 2016). However, given that community participation extends beyond physical involvement and enables participants to evaluate the issues and available resources in their surroundings, local knowledge is essential in identifying the necessary activities (Pettersson et al. 2017).

Accordingly, Lyons et al. (2001: 1233) argues that community participation has grown more and more vital to empowering the local community by enhancing the long-term viability of physical infrastructure. Participating in rural development initiatives with the community might improve their standard of living and vice versa, hence, Berman (2017) further argues that the success of participation is dependent on the participation type: unilateral or collaborative procedures, with the latter being bottom-up and the former as top-down. That notwithstanding, however, the systems utilised in each community development project or programme are identified by using these nomenclatures, with one approach chosen over another based on their perspective.

2.4 *To-down participation*

Top-down participation is the planning perspective, which emphasis centralised decision making in the society, while neglecting the inputs of beneficiary communities. Top-down tend to rest on an some organised plans and designs, as well as project costs and implementation times, without considering variations in the sociocultural and environmental conditions in various areas (Isidiho & Sabran, 2016). The prescriptive and bureaucratic nature of the top-down is anchored on the centralized planning model of the past, which neglect communities in their project decision making. Hence, Popple (1995) argues that the top-bottom method is a psychological tactic used by the ruling class to rescue and reform the deserving poor while also incorporating and integrating subordinate groups into the dominant ideology for their security and survival.

It is also argued that the top-down approach is not empowering, since planning is normally the exclusive of professionals providing no space for the communities (Cornwall & Pratt, 2010) this hinder genuine participation because decision making process occurs at the highest level and is then foisted on the people. The lack of citizen power is argued to be the main drawback of this approach, hence the transition to citizen control process.

2.5 *Bottom-up participation*

Bottom-up participation is the participation approach that empowers people to pursue their development activities and projects. Bottom-up, in contrast to top-down ones, are channels in which the people themselves establish the guidelines for their participation (Van Meerkerk, 2019). Bottom-up approach

increases the local buy-in and the legitimacy of the service delivery outputs, given that the community forms part of the problem-solving process (Davids et al. 2021). Bottom-up has the potential for incorporating people's ideas and needs in the development process, because the people at the grassroots are given responsibility to partake in the decision-making of development interventions. Accordingly, Panda (2007) adds that, bottom-up synthesises, organises, and distributes the lessons discovered from the project to the community.

Furthermore, access accorded communities in bottom-up approach have the potential to enhance cost effective, replicable and sustainable projects given their buy-in. However, the bottom-up approach also does have some limitations, given the power dynamics in participation which inhibit certain groups. Despite this however, the top-down has remained the preferred approach for managing development projects and programmes by international development agencies, NGOs and governments (Kothari & Cooke, 2001).

3.0 Literature Review

3.1 Constituency project as a development approach

The intention of CDF, or CPs as used in this research, is an intervention of government meant to increase public accessibility to development. It is a result of a general unhappiness with the results of top-down planning, hence the call for a new bottom-up strategy where communities and stakeholders get to participate, determine their development priorities, and allocate available resources accordingly (Francis et al., 2009). In Kenya the CPs Acts allocate 2.5 percent of all collected government ordinary revenue every financial year for development programmes in the constituencies (Waribu, 2016), amounting to millions of dollars being allocated in Kenya since 2003 for CPs (Harris, & Posner, 2019). Similarly, over 2.95 billion shilling was allocated in 2005 in Uganda, with India, which has two CDF-style: The Member of Legislative Assembly Local Area Development Fund (MLA-LAD) for the Legislative Assembly of each of the country's 28 States, and the Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) at the national level. Every year, a certain sum is given to each single-member parliamentary constituency, benefiting the MPLADS; (Udefuna et al. 2013). In Nigeria, even though CPs has been a consistent feature of development since 2000, there has not been a consistent resource allocation formula. This is evident during the early phase of the intervention, where funds are routed to legislator's personal bank account. These spending variations highlight the complex nature of CPs, which van Zyl (2010) suggest that there is no one size fits all. Despite their variations, CPs share one common feature of being facilitated by legislators who are proximate to the constituent's (ibid). Legislators believe that they should have budgeted money for district development, and CPs aim to meet this requirement (Barkan & Mattes, 2013). Thus, it is further argued that constituents do exert pressure on legislators to provide job and development projects to their constituents (ibid).

In light of the core principle of CPs, which is to foster infrastructure and human development at the community or constituency level (Gathoni & Ngugi, 2016), with the people. It is imperative therefore, to

adopt a people-driven approach which foster relationships between government institution stakeholders and civil society stakeholders as well as between central and local stakeholders. This is argued to eliminate the bureaucratic red tape that reduces the efficiency and efficacy of typical government development programmes (IBP, 2010:1). In this respect, funds are spent quicker and on the appropriate projects when distributed directly to the constituency level and so they can determine their own local development goals (Tshagna, 2010; IBP, 2010:1).

Although the community's development is at the heart of CPs', it is apparent, however, that CPs supplements other development initiatives and contribute to the programmes, policies, and services that are created for ministries and local governments rather than a replacement for them (Handbook on CPs, 2016). Hence, the argument for separation of power comes into effect as argued by Omotoso & Oladeji (2015) that the three arms of government are separate and independent of each, therefore the role of legislators in CPs is seen tantamount to good governance. However, the legislature upholds accountability and openness in government by having the jurisdiction to invite the executive including heads of MDAs to investigate abuses of power committed by or the misappropriation of state funds. As such, the legislators might be viewed as the protector of good governance and long-lasting democracy (Omotoso & Olayide, 2019).

However, seen CPs have become part of the legislature's role in Nigeria, just like in other developing countries (Barkan, 2008; van Zyl, 2010). CP is a policy meant for the entire country, and the projects are supposed to be initiated at the local constituencies of a legislative member or member of parliament (MP). CPs are also complementary intervention projects conceived by members of the legislature, either at the state or national level of government. They are funded through the budget with the aim of redistributing national resources across legislative constituencies to address and improve infrastructure and reduce poverty (Kakungu, 2013; Ochieng & Tubey, 2013; Ojwang, 2014). CPs essentially concentrate on services and development in areas of healthcare, pipe-borne water/motorised hand pumps wells, rural electrification, drainage, empowerment initiatives and training, and classrooms (Awofeso & Irabor, 2020:50), where they are most needed, in the constituencies of members of parliament (IBP, 2010).

However, critics of CPs have argued that despite their pride in their equitable resource distribution to constituencies (Ochieng & Tubey, 2013), CPs policies are seen as misplaced. Given the above, the idea of CPs in Nigeria is rooted in controversy (Nnamani et al., 2012; Olaoye, 2014; & Olugbenga, 2015), with some arguing amongst others that its lack of constitutional basis, high-level corruption, poor execution of projects, patronage and clientelism, and the absence of monitoring and evaluation have served to impede community participation and ownership. Thus, the study investigated how CPs involve communities in their development in Ughelli/Udi federal constituency Delta State.

4.0 Theoretical framework

Arnstein (1969) constructed a typology of eight degrees of participation, known as the ladder of participation, signifying the type, level, and intensity of control and power that each stage of participation gives to citizens. Each rung of this ladder indicates how much power citizens have in influencing development outcomes (Karner et al., 2019). The participation ladder organises citizen involvement options on a scale ranging from manipulation to true citizen power. The power citizens have to influence development outcomes increases as one climbs the ladder. Stage eight indicates the maximum participation level, which is citizen control. Citizens have complete control over the direction of development in this community. The two lowest rungs of the ladder, representing manipulation and therapy, respectively, are the least effective types of citizen engagement since they represent non-participation. For instance, individuals are made to appear engaged when, in reality, those in positions of authority control and influence development outcomes. This ceremony is little more than window dressing, in which there is zero involvement. The top-down planning reflects this stage in the ladder (Hilyard, 2001). The third, fourth, and fifth rungs, which include informing, consulting, and placating, are classified as tokenistic and offer the smallest amount of potential for public participation. Lastly, citizen power, which makes up the top three rungs of the ladder, entails collaboration, delegated authority, and citizen control. Citizens can attempt to achieve a compromise, make concessions, and participate in the decision-making process (Kessy, 2013).

Given the above, the amount of citizen power given is viewed as appropriate for bringing about successful community participation when looking at Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation. However, CPs as practice in Ughelli/Udi federal constituency of Delta represent the two bottom rungs of the ladder, which stand for manipulation and therapy. In this constituency the town hall meetings, constituency briefings, and campaigns are made to appear inclusive of the communities, but in reality, those in positions of power (legislators and government officials) have significant control and they influence how deliberations on CPs are carried out. Often Needs assessment a critical factor for project success, which prioritise project or project according to their importance is hardly performed. It is common that projects are decided by the legislators with the assumption that they know the constituent's problems. This was the case were a primary health clinic was built away from the residential area, with no electricity and deplorable access road making it unusable. Arnstein views this process as little more than window dressing in which there is zero involvement, which is mistakenly interpreted as actual participation (Arnstein, 1967:217). Overall, stakeholders are permitted some level of participation, which extent is largely decided by the CPs facilitators (legislators), and quite often, it lacks the needed ownership, were the community feels a sense of attachment and willing to sustain it. This Arnstein describes as having no certainty of changing the status quo of what she referred to as "tokenism" (ibid).

In some instances, tokenism is evident in the disbursement of financial grants for constituents. Here, businesses, agricultural and technical or skills training are provided with names and other personal details for onward screening to benefit from empowerment programmes, which are aimed at improving their wellbeing. However, in the end, the names of those successfully screened and captured in the data repository of the government are often replaced with those of family, friends and party loyalist of the

legislators, who then become the actual beneficiaries. Where ordinary citizens are selected, they are mostly pitched in areas that are non-empowering.

While the top three rungs of the ladder, known as citizen power, provide citizens with complete responsibility for decision-making and implementation. Regrettably, this is hardly achievable because participation has remained top-down and do not allow the communities meaningful participation in CPs processes, and therefore unable to exert any form of influence. But Zeldin et al. (2000:6) argue that regardless of how communities are neglected, via top-down planning, the community can bring in their knowledge to ensure the project's success when given the chance to participate meaningfully in any development programme.

5.0 Methodology

Within the frame of qualitative research, a single case study design was adopted. It is an extended, thorough description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon, such as a programme, an institution, a person, a process, or a social unit, which Feagin et al., (2016) sees as an “in-depth, multifaceted analysis, employing qualitative research methodologies, of a particular social event”. The case study approach emphasises not just a thorough examination of the chosen social unit but also knowledge of its background and the context in which it functions (Kothari, 2004). Hence, qualitative data are the responses offered by the study population reflected in their narratives and wards. Five (5) face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted with community leaders in Ughelli at different convenient locations between 9th to 13th November 2021 which comprised of the community chief, youth leader, women leader, clergy, and the representative of a civil society organisation. According to Moore (2006:145), focus group discussions (FGDs) with participants should occur in an informal, comfortable environments that do not provide any risks. Two key officials representing the government (MDAs') from Border Communities Development Agency (BCDA) and The Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) were also interviewed along with a member of the national assembly representing the constituency.

A focus group discussion was also employed following the in-depth interview to elicit further information of the participants lived experiences with five persons including two women for one hour. According to Morgan's illustration (1997:22–23) the in-depth interviews might take place before FGDs during fieldwork. A learning was achieved, as increased information enhanced an understanding of study phenomena as reflected in the selection of the FGD participants, the environment, venue, time, and duration of the FGDs. This was helpful in stimulating discussions on specific topics in order to collect data critical to the phenomena under investigation from the participants' own experiences, which gives the researcher a thorough and shared picture of the issue(s). The interview data were transcribed and thematically analysed using Atlas.ti software.

A coding frame was developed and conceptualized from the respondent's views on community participation in CPs in the NDR. Themes were developed via an iterated process of consultation with the data, which were in the form of quotes from the allocated codes and themes using the Atlas.ti software, which helped speed up the generation of the report. Saldana (2013) described this coding process to involve descriptive and explanatory codes, which incorporates both open coding and the in-vivo coding methodologies, and this is how the coding process was done.

6.0 Discussion of findings

This section presents and discusses the findings of the study. The objective of the study is to assess community participation in CPs' in Ughelli/Udi federal constituency of Delta in the NDR. The interviewees identified that an understanding of community participation in CPs' also requires an understanding of the stakeholders involved. This is necessary given the influence and power relations amongst the various stakeholders: the government officials, legislators, and officials of MDAs on the one hand, and the community members and civil society on the other. The power relations also influence who participates and how they participate.

6.1 Stakeholders in CPs

Stakeholders in CPs' refers to all the categories of people that participate in every stage of the project or programme process. The study discovered that diverse stakeholders exist whose synergy is needed for the successful implementation of CPs. They are stakeholder holders because of their interests in the success of the project. The study also revealed that some stakeholders are more influential than others, especially legislators, who tend to exert more influence than other stakeholders¹. Likewise, stakeholders with competing and conflicting interests participate in community engagement (Long, 2003).

The findings from the study suggest that a legislator is much more than a representative of a constituent whose interests he is elected to represent in the government by performing certain roles. The representatives bridge the gap in the communities and provide an equitable spread of development through their representatives from across the political constituencies in both the legislative houses (Ekweremadu, nd). The findings from the research also affirmed that legislators are important stakeholders as representatives of the community². This confirmed Omotoso & Oladeji (2019) view that the legislators are representing their constituents in government. Their role as representatives therefore, allow them to serve as gate-keepers for their constituents in government, were development planning policies are considered including CPs'.

¹ Participant 'B' in FGD

² Community chief

In addition, legislators also interface with the communities to know the community's areas of need and reflect them in the budget³. Accordingly, it is important for politicians to occasionally visit the grassroots in order to learn about their issues, understand their wants, and ensure that these demands are met⁴. On the other hand, while the community members are also stakeholders, their role in CPs' is often not given the necessary attention, given that the representatives who are supposed to liaise with them hardly consider nor adopt the community's opinion about their needs, which often creates a feeling of disenchantment⁵. Similarly, representatives of the MDAs' also come to the community with a pre-decided project, without the input of the beneficiaries of the project. This are often times seen as ceremonial⁶. Also, another finding confirmed that the communities, are not usually consulted on projects⁷, even though CPs are about service delivery, which involves the provisions of social services to the individuals directly in the communities⁸. Hence, it can be said that the legislator's involvement in governance has increased over time. This has however, attracted negative attention especially with regards to how CPs' are been run. Evidence abound where projects commissioned by the legislators often add no value and they become isolated projects efforts, since they lack clear synergy which ensures that project initiatives come to fruition (Dogara, 2016).

6.2 Avenues for Participation in CPs'

This study discovered that for the community to meaningfully benefit from CPs', avenues and forums need to be made accessible to all stakeholders to be involve in CPs'. These avenues serve as platforms for the participation, engagement and the collection of constituents needs. Mainly townhall meetings, campaigns, constituency briefings, constituency offices are the spaces identified for community participation in CPs'. Even though, different issues require different setting findings revealed the town halls are a very important avenues for CPs' participation, because they provide the avenues where pressing communal issues are deliberated, with the chiefs and elders taking the lead⁹. Similarly, when development opportunities come, they are tabled in this arena for collective decision making, allowing for the community members to lend their voices. Community leaders usually sermon town hall meetings to articulate issues of community interest and sometimes the directives for the meetings come from the politicians. However, findings revealed that often promises made by politicians are not redeemed, as they are hardly accessible¹⁰. Politicians tend to exploit situation for their selfish interest (Amaechi et al., 2018).

³ Key informant (legislator)

⁴ Key informant (ICPC)

⁵ CSO representative

⁶ Women leader

⁷ Participant 'D' in FGD

⁸ Participant 'E' in FGD

⁹ Youth leader

¹⁰ Clergy

Campaigns are also platforms for community in CPs'. They provide the setting where representatives engage their constituents in a gathering and deliver their intensions as manifestos. The findings revealed campaigns as avenues for interactions between stakeholders, however, politicians use them to make all sorts of promises, which are hardly kept, because once they get elected, they hardly come back to fulfil those promises, until another campaign cycle. Arnstein sees it as little more than window dressing in which there is zero involvement, which is mistakenly interpreted as actual participation (Arnstein 1967:217).

Constituency briefing is also an avenue for participating in CPs'. This is a briefing session are often facilitated by legislators to inform their constituents of governmental activities, which also serves as a feedback mechanism for the representative. The study also found that liaising with the community for constituency briefings is important because constituents get to know the needs of the people, which also enables collective decision-making with regards CPs'¹¹. However, this avenue, the study found, is discriminatory and open to only party loyalists, restricting the participation space. It is also argued that the government can impede the participation of the poor because those with political power often control the project (Moberg, 2016). This kind of participatory process denies the poor their voices and creates inequality (Cullen et al., 2011: 355–356; Chambers, 2008: 141–142).

The study findings further revealed that constituency offices are organize spaces provided by the legislators as liaison offices for interactions and communication with constituents. Likewise, Smith (2003) sees them also as spaces for constituent engagement with their legislators. Constituency office is an important platform because it enables constituents lodge their complaint to our representatives¹². Constituency office are created to maintain close and interactive relationship that will help to deepen democratic governance (Dan-Azumi, 2018). However, despite their importance some of the study findings further revealed that not all the constituency offices are functional¹³. The findings further found that despite the statutory monies allotted for their operation, constituency offices are typically mismanaged, despite the fact that they are supposed to serve as a clearinghouse for constituent demands¹⁴. Given the aforementioned, even though constituency offices are typically thought of as a viable alternative for community engagement, the opportunities for community participation become restricted. According to a study by Macleod (2006), there are a number of factors that impede the establishment, services, management, and administration of constituency offices, including a lack of guidelines and a lack of political will to manage these offices effectively.

¹¹ Key informant (BCDC)

¹² Youth leader

¹³ Women leader

¹⁴ Participant 'A' in FGD

7.0 Conclusions

This study assessed community participation in CPs' Ughelli/Udi federal constituency of Delta of the NDR. In-depth interviews were conducted with the key informants and FGD on how the community participates in CPs. First the findings revealed that there are diverse stakeholders involve in the operation of CPs' with different power and influence, which makes participation to be influenced by those with more power. Secondly, the result also showed that the legislators and officials of MDA's, hardly involve the community in CPs' processes, even when they are involved it is ceremonials. Despite the community members being the target for the projects. The study also creates an understanding that the avenues for community participation in CPs' like tall hall, campaigns, constituency office and constituency briefing are often not free of interruptions and influence, and are therefore controlled.

In line with the findings, community participation in CPs' is not only about participation in forums and activities but about genuine access to participation in the developmental projects. This can be achieved when community members are not just invited but are listened and heard throughout the process of CPs' decision making and implementation. In other words, community participation in CPs' in the NDR should revolve around giving the community genuine access to participate, and not to transfer decision from the top, as this will enhance the success of the projects in the communities.

In nutshell, government, development planners and community members would find the results of this study relevant as it would serve as a guide to subsequent formulation and execution of CPs' in communities such as the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Hence, the findings, recommends that, to ensure community participation in CPs' in the NDR, genuine access to participation that enables the communities to raise their concerns in an environment of fairness and transparency should be provided, via institutional framework of the law.

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