



Youth Participation in Community-Based Development Projects: Evidence from Tofa and Lambu Towns, Tofa L.G.A., Kano State

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Abstract

This study examined youth participation in community-based development initiatives in the towns of Tofa and Lambu in the Tofa Local Government Area, Kano State. The study focused on the extent of youth involvement, the factors influencing their participation, and their perceptions regarding the impact of their contributions. A descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The population comprised youths aged 18–35 years, from which a sample of 384 respondents was selected using stratified random sampling. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages for demographic information, mean and standard deviations for research questions. The findings revealed that youth participation in development activities was moderate. Many respondents reported participating in community programmes and attending meetings on development matters. However, their involvement was largely limited to implementation activities, with minimal participation in leadership and decision-making processes. The study further showed that visible project outcomes and support from community leaders encouraged youth involvement, whereas lack of awareness and limited time due to work or school reduced participation. Most respondents believed their contributions positively influenced their communities and enhanced their personal development, although many felt excluded from important decisions. The study concludes that while youth are actively involved in community initiatives, more effort is needed to ensure meaningful inclusion in planning and leadership. It therefore recommends more inclusive strategies that strengthen youth engagement and participation in community development processes.

Keywords: Youth Participation, Community Development, Decision-Making, Motivation, Nigeria

Introduction

Nigerian youth occupy a significant portion of the country's population. Many estimates place those aged 15 to 35 at one-third of the total population (Ogar, 2020). These young men and women are not just tomorrow's leaders; they represent an important resource for community development today. Unfortunately, across various communities, their actual involvement in community-based development projects remains limited or poorly structured. Research shows that when youth are actively engaged in community programmes, the outcomes are meaningful. For example, Dokubo et al. (2020) found that in selected LGAs in Rivers State, youth participation improved the sustainability of community-based development projects, yet the same study revealed that the youth had minimal roles in needs identification and planning. Similarly, studies from other parts of Nigeria suggest that many community development initiatives retain a top-down approach, with youth involvement mainly symbolic or as labour rather than decision-makers (Wordu, 2018). When youth are included only indirectly, both their potential and the relevance of the projects are undermined. In Tofa Local Government Area (L.G.A.) of Kano State, the scenario reflects these findings. While

a range of community-based development projects spanning education, health, sanitation and infrastructure are underway, there is limited understanding of how youth interact with these initiatives. Are they merely participants? Do they shape projects' priorities and outcomes? What drives their involvement, and what prevents them from being more deeply engaged? Lacking this understanding, community initiatives may overlook a vital group rich in creativity, enthusiasm, and grassroots knowledge. By examining youth participation in community-based development projects in Tofa L.G.A, this study aims to explore the frequency of youth participation, the factors that facilitate or hinder their engagement, and their own views on the effects of their involvement. The aim is to generate insights that support youth-centred development approaches, promoting not only grassroots empowerment but also wider community strength and sustainability.

Research shows that many community development projects claim "participation", but the involvement of youth commonly ends at execution rather than planning or evaluation. For example, in the Kwami Local Government Area of Gombe State, a study found that 61.5% of youth reported participating in infrastructural programmes, yet key factors such as education level significantly influenced their involvement (Usman et al., 2018). In Ibadan, Oyo State, youth indicated moderately high levels of participation, but the study noted their involvement was largely limited to tasks rather than decision-making (Osu et al., 2023). These studies suggest that while youth may be present in community projects, their roles often remain restricted, thus limiting the true extent of their engagement.

Understanding what drives or hinders youth engagement reveals important insights for inclusive development practice. A systematic review on youth volunteerism found that intrinsic motivation (such as altruism and responsibility) and extrinsic motivations (like skill development and career opportunities) both matter a great deal; yet barriers including time constraints, lack of recognition, and weak institutional support frequently undermine sustained participation. Beyond altruism, recent research emphasises that youth participation is rarely driven by "pure" altruism; instead, it is a sophisticated negotiation between personal growth and social impact. Contemporary studies suggest that "civic engagement" act as a protective factor for mental health. According to Sprague Martinez et al. (2020), when youth are involved in shared decision-making rather than simple consultation, they experience increased resilience and a stronger sense of community belonging. While intrinsic values like empathy are present, extrinsic drivers are becoming dominant. A study by Atieh et al. (2025) highlights that youth increasingly view community projects as "career readiness" hubs where they can develop leadership, problem-solving, and communication skills that are difficult to acquire in traditional classrooms. Youth are motivated by the opportunity to experiment with their political and social identities. Haji and Karieny (2025) note that in developing countries, the identity of being a "change agent" provides a social status that motivates sustained engagement. Despite high interest, youth face a significant "participation fraction," often leading to dropouts. One of the most persistent barriers is the lack of genuine authority. Qasem (2013) reports that youth often feel used for "photo-ops" (tokenism) while being excluded from the actual design and budgeting of projects. This creates a perception that their voices are "listened to but not heard". The "opportunity cost" of participating is a major hurdle. Mwei (2016) and Atieh et al. (2025) both identify financial constraints, such as the cost of transport or the need to work for wages, as disproportionately excluding youth from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, thereby turning community participation into an "elite" activity. There is a growing psychological barrier described as "perceived irrelevance". When projects do not address immediate and tangible needs (like water security or local safety), youth often view them as "boring" or disconnected from their reality, leading to what researchers call "civic apathy" (Bauml et al., 2023).

How youth see the results of their involvement matters greatly for the motivation, ownership, and sustainability of community initiatives. In Rivers State, a study found that youth reported a "very high" positive impact when involved in project execution, yet their input during needs identification and planning was rated low, highlighting a mismatch between being present and being meaningfully involved (Dokubo et al., 2020). In Calabar, educational attainment predicted youth participation; youth who felt their voices were heard reported greater satisfaction with outcomes (Ogar, 2020). These findings imply that perceptions of impact are shaped not just by presence in projects, but by the quality of role and the degree of influence youth have in those initiatives.

In spite of the increasing recognition of youth as important partners in sustainable development, their participation in community-based development projects remains generally inconsistent and lacks depth, especially in Tofa Local Government Area in Kano State. While youth account for a notable proportion of the population and possesses the

energy, creativity, and local knowledge to make a substantial contribution, many development efforts still fail to engage them beyond passive participation. Evidence from similar regions across Nigeria suggests that most community development projects are designed and implemented with little input from youth, particularly during the planning and decision-making stages. When youth are engaged, it is often limited to implementing predefined tasks rather than co-creating solutions that directly affect their communities (Dokubo et al., 2020; Wordu, 2018). The absence of meaningful inclusion compromises both the impact and sustainability of development efforts, as key stakeholders, such as youth, are not empowered to take ownership of the outcomes. In Tofa L. G. A., where many community-based development initiatives are ongoing, there is little empirical evidence showing how, why or to what extent youth are involved. Are they active participants in shaping the goals of these projects, or are they simply recipients? What motivates or discourages them from getting involved? Without clear answers to these questions, development efforts may continue to miss the opportunity to fully harness youth potential, leading to less impactful and less inclusive outcomes. This study addresses this critical gap by examining the level, nature and impact of youth participation in community development projects in Tofa and Lambu towns of Tofa L. G. A. Grasping the authentic experiences and viewpoints of young people in this context is important for designing strategies that truly engage them, amplify their voices, and enhance the relevance and sustainability of development initiatives.

This study would be carried out with the aim of finding out the following specific objectives:

1. To assess the extent of youth involvement in community-based development projects in Tofa and Lambu towns, Tofa L.G.A, Kano State.
2. To identify key motivations and barriers influencing youth participation in such projects in Tofa and Lambu towns, Tofa L.G.A, Kano State.
3. To examine youth perceptions of the impact and effectiveness of their contributions to community development projects in Tofa and Lambu towns, Tofa L.G.A, Kano State.

To align the study with its objectives, the following research questions have been developed:

1. What is the level of youth participation in community-based development projects in Tofa and Lambu towns, Tofa L.G.A, Kano State?
2. What factors motivate or hinder youth involvement in community development activities in Tofa and Lambu towns, Tofa L.G.A, Kano State?
3. How do youths perceive the impact of their participation in community-based development projects in Tofa and Lambu towns, Tofa L.G.A., Kano State?

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to examine youth participation in community-based development projects in the towns of Tofa and Lambu in the Tofa Local Government Area, Kano State. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to collect data directly from respondents regarding their level of participation, motivating factors, barriers, and perceptions about their involvement in community development activities. The study population comprised youth aged 18–35 years residing in the towns of Tofa and Lambu. Based on the estimated population figures provided by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2022), the combined population of the two towns was approximately 20,330, with Tofa having 12,330 residents and Lambu 8,000. The target youth population was estimated at 5,208, assuming that 25% of the population falls within the youth age bracket (NPC & ICF, 2019; NBS, 2022).

A sample size of 384 respondents was determined using Cochran's formula for sample size determination at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. $n = 384$. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure adequate representation of respondents across the age categories of 18–24, 25–29, and 30–35 years in both communities. Data for the study were collected using a structured questionnaire developed by the researchers. The instrument consisted of sections covering demographic information, level of youth participation, motivating and hindering factors, and perceptions regarding the impact of participation in community development projects. Responses to the research questions were measured using a four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1).

To ensure the instrument's validity, the questionnaire underwent face and content validation by experts in Adult Education and Community Development. A pilot study was conducted among 30 youths outside the study area who had characteristics similar to the target population. The data obtained from the pilot test were analysed using Cronbach's Alpha reliability method, which produced a reliability coefficient of 0.82, indicating that the instrument was reliable for the study. The questionnaires were administered by trained research assistants fluent in both Hausa and English. Face-to-face administration was adopted to improve response rate and ensure proper understanding of the questionnaire items. Respondents were adequately informed about the purpose of the study, and confidentiality of their responses was assured. The data collected were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. Descriptive statistics including mean and standard deviations were used to address the research questions. The decision rule for interpreting the mean responses was based on the criterion mean of the four-point Likert scale. Therefore, any item with a mean score of 2.50 and above was accepted, while any item with a mean score below 2.50 was rejected.

Results

Table 1: Age Distribution of Respondents (N = 384)

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18–24 years	30	7.8
25–29 years	100	26.0
30–35 years	254	66.1
Total	384	100.0

Source: Field Survey (2026)

Table 1 shows the age distribution of the respondents. The majority of the respondents (66.1%, n = 254) fell within the 30–35 years age bracket, followed by those aged 25–29 years (26.0%, n = 100), while respondents aged 18–24 years constituted the smallest group (7.8%, n = 30). This distribution indicates that the study predominantly captured the views of older youth, a group likely to have had more exposure to community development initiatives. The dominance of the 30–35-year cohort suggests that this segment is more actively engaged or more accessible within the study communities.

Table 2: Educational Level of Respondents (N = 384)

Educational Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
SSCE	30	7.8
NCE/ND	200	52.1
Bachelor's Degree/HND	154	40.1
Total	384	100.0

Source: Field Survey (2026)

Table 2 reveals the educational backgrounds of the respondents. More than half (52.1%, n = 200) held National Certificate of Education (NCE) or National Diploma (ND) qualifications, while 40.1% (n = 154) were holders of Bachelor's Degree or Higher National Diploma (HND). Respondents with only Senior Secondary Certificate of Education (SSCE) represented 7.8% (n = 30) of the sample. This profile suggests a relatively educated respondent pool, which may positively influence their awareness of community development issues and their capacity to engage meaningfully in project activities.

Presentation of Data Based on Research Questions

The data are presented below, aligned with the three major research questions that guided this study. Each research question is addressed using descriptive statistics derived from the corresponding section of the questionnaire.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics on the Level of Youth Participation in Community-Based Development Projects (N = 384)

S/No.	Statement	Mean	Std Dev.	Decision
1	I have participated in community development projects in my area.	3.54	0.66	Accepted
2	Youths are regularly involved in planning community projects.	2.78	0.98	Accepted
3	I often attend community meetings where development issues are discussed.	2.63	1.17	Accepted
4	Youths take leadership in community-based projects.	2.36	1.23	Rejected
5	My participation in such projects is frequent and meaningful.	2.40	1.00	Rejected
Cluster Mean		2.74		Accepted

Source: Field Survey (2026)

Items 1–3 were accepted with mean scores of 3.54, 2.78, and 2.63 respectively, indicating that youths participate in community development activities and attend meetings. However, Items 4 and 5 with mean scores of 2.36 and 2.40 were rejected, showing low involvement in leadership and meaningful participation. The cluster mean of 2.74 indicates a moderate level of youth participation in community development projects.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics on Motivating and Hindering Factors Affecting Youth Participation (N = 384)

S/No.	Statement	Mean	Std Dev.	Decision
6	I am motivated to participate in community projects when I see the impact.	3.55	0.71	Accepted
7	Lack of financial incentives discourages youth participation.	2.38	0.85	Rejected
8	Support from community leaders encourages my involvement.	3.59	0.76	Accepted
9	I lack awareness about available development projects in my area.	3.00	0.91	Accepted
10	Youth participation is hindered by lack of time due to school/work.	3.08	1.01	Accepted
Cluster Mean		3.12		Accepted

Source: Field Survey (2026)

Items 6, 8, 9, and 10 with mean scores of 3.55, 3.59, 3.00, and 3.08 respectively were accepted, showing that visible project impact, support from community leaders, lack of awareness, and time constraints influence youth participation. Item 7 with a mean score of 2.38 was rejected, indicating that financial incentives are not a major motivating factor. The cluster mean of 3.12 shows that these factors significantly influence youth participation.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics on Perception of Youth Impact (N = 384)

S/No.	Statement	Mean	Std Dev.	Decision
11	Youth involvement leads to better project outcomes	3.18	0.96	Accepted
12	My participation has positively influenced my community	3.28	0.88	Accepted
13	Community members value youth contributions to development	3.00	1.11	Accepted
14	I feel empowered through my participation in development projects	3.11	1.00	Accepted
15	My voice is heard and respected in decision-making processes	2.07	1.05	Rejected
Cluster Mean		2.93		Accepted

Source: Field Survey (2026)

Items 11–14 with mean scores of 3.18, 3.28, 3.00, and 3.11, respectively, were accepted, indicating that youths perceive their participation as beneficial to community development and personal empowerment. Item 15, with a mean score of 2.07, was rejected, showing that many youths feel excluded from decision-making processes. The cluster mean of 2.93 indicates a positive perception of the impact of youth on community development projects.

Discussion

The findings of this study show that youth participation in community development projects in Tofa L.G.A. is present but not very deep. Many young people reported that they participate in project activities and attend meetings, yet their

involvement often ends there. They are rarely included in leadership roles or in making key decisions. This pattern supports earlier findings by Dokubo et al. (2020), who observed that youth are often involved in project execution but have little input during planning. Similarly, Wordu (2018) noted that youth participation in many Nigerian communities is often limited and largely symbolic.

The study also highlights a clear gap between participation and real inclusion. While youth are active during implementation, they are less involved in decision-making. This aligns with the work of Mwei (2016), who found that young people are often excluded from the planning and evaluation stages, reducing their sense of ownership. Similarly, Sprague Martinez et al. (2020) argued that when youth are not part of shared decision-making, their engagement and connection to projects tend to weaken. In terms of motivation, the findings show that youth are more willing to participate when they can see clear results from community projects. This supports the view of Atieh et al. (2025), who explained that young people are often driven by opportunities for personal growth and visible impact. The strong influence of community leaders found in this study also aligns with Haji and Karieny (2025), who emphasised the role of social support and recognition in encouraging youth involvement. At the same time, the study identified a lack of awareness and time constraints as key barriers to participation. This is consistent with the findings of Bauml, Smith, and Blevins (2023), who noted that many young people are unable to participate simply because they are not well informed. In addition, Qasem (2013) also highlighted that limited access to information reduces youth involvement in community activities. The issue of time constraint supports the work of Haji and Karieny (2025), who noted that school and work responsibilities often compete with community engagement. An important finding of this study is that financial incentives are not a major reason for participation. This supports the argument by Osu et al. (2023), who found that youth are more motivated by a sense of belonging and social responsibility than by money. It also agrees with Igwe et al. (2024), who reported that recognition and the opportunity to contribute meaningfully are stronger motivators than financial rewards.

Finally, the study shows that most youth believe their participation has a positive impact on their communities and on their personal development. However, many still feel that their voices are not heard in decision-making processes. This reflects the findings of Dokubo et al. (2020), who noted a gap between being present in projects and having real influence. It suggests that while youth are involved, they are not yet fully included in ways that allow them to shape outcomes. Overall, the findings confirm that youth participation in community development is growing but remains limited in depth. While young people are willing to contribute, greater effort is needed to move from simple involvement to meaningful inclusion, especially in leadership and decision-making roles.

Conclusion

This study examined youth participation in community development projects in the towns of Tofa and Lambu, focusing on their levels of involvement, the factors shaping that involvement, and their views on their contributions. The findings show that while many young people participate in community activities, their involvement is mostly limited to implementation rather than to planning or leadership. Participation is stronger when youth can see clear results from projects and when they receive support from community leaders. However, limited awareness and time constraints continue to reduce their level of involvement. Despite these challenges, most youth believe their contributions are meaningful and make a difference in their communities. Overall, youth participation in the areas is present but not fully developed. Creating more opportunities for young people to take part in decision-making and leadership roles will help make community development efforts more inclusive and effective.

Recommendations

1. There is a need for community leaders to start involving young people earlier in projects, especially when decisions are being made, not only when work has already been planned.
2. Information about community projects should be shared more openly. Many youth are left out simply because they do not hear about these opportunities on time.
3. Leaders in the community should make a conscious effort to encourage youth participation, as their attitude often influences whether young people get involved or not.
4. Those in charge of projects should try to keep youths updated on what is happening. When young people see progress, they are more likely to stay committed.

- . 5. Finally, more attention should be given to training and mentoring young people so they can gradually take up leadership roles in their communities.

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