

## Community Power Structure: The Role of Local Leaders in Community Development Decision Making in Ajaawa, Oyo State, Nigeria

F.A. Kuponiyi

*Department of Agricultural Economics & Extension, Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, P. M. B. 4000, Ogbomoso, Oyo State, Nigeria*  
*Telephone: 2348033528088 (Mobile); E-mail: adekupo2000@yahoo.com*

**KEYWORDS** Leaders. Community Development. People Mobilization

**ABSTRACT** This study investigates the participation of local leaders in decision-making in Ajaawa Community of Oyo State, Nigeria. Sixty community leaders (both visible and concealed) were identified and interviewed with the aid of validated interviewed schedule. Data revealed that the respondents spread across social, political, religious and traditional functions. Twenty percent are female, 90% married, while 8% are below 40 years old, mean age is 58years. About 88% are literate. Major areas of decision-making where leaders regularly participate are religion, chieftaincy, community safety and community development. Community development commands the highest involvement (81.7%) followed by community safety (70%). Of all the CD projects undertaken in the last 5 years, the market had the highest proportion (71.7%) of leaders involved in its decision-making followed by the palace (63.3%). Leadership responsibility areas for each project are people mobilization, meetings, finance, and linkage. Personal participation in CD projects by the leaders revealed that the market and palace commanded the highest involvement. Where leaders unite and make sound collective decisions, the community maintains peace and development.

### INTRODUCTION

Community power structure is the complex network of relationships between the recognized power holders and the interplay of their roles in a community. These power holders, otherwise known as leaders, direct the affairs of the society towards the achievement of objectives. Jibowo (1992) describes power structure as “patterned distribution of authority and influence among various actors in a group or community”.

The concept of leadership is very crucial to the survival of any society. Even where there are established norms, leaders are still needed to ensure compliance with such norms for societal orderliness and healthy being. Van den Ban and Hawkins (1996) define leadership as the “directing, influencing and controlling of others in pursuit of a group goal”. This implies that the function of making decisions lies on the leaders. Ekong (2003) even sees leadership as being synonymous with decision-making and therefore regards decision-makers as community leaders. He further posits that an effective means of identifying leaders should include a systematic observation of who decision-makers are for various community issues. Leaders provide the basis for improving the quality of life in

communities (Fear et al., 1985). Because effective leadership does not exist in many rural communities, rural community development efforts should include identifying and training potential leaders from diverse backgrounds (Winter et al., 1985).

Rural community development literature emphasizes the importance of citizen participation as a means of strengthening communities (Flora, Flora and Fey, 2004; Martin and Wilkinson, 1985). Advocates and practitioners of rural community development also believe that citizens should be meaningfully involved in community decision-making (Coe, 1990). For development to occur, there is need for a greater participation of local people in development process which will change the nature and direction of development intervention as well as result in a type of development which will have local people's support and recognition (CASSAD, 1994). However, Jackman (1987) emphasizes the impact of community structure, especially its power structure, on the availability of chances for citizens' participation in its decision-making process. Community leadership structure, its composition, and administrative styles dictate the level and extent of citizen's involvement in its decision-making and development activities.

Local leadership should also act as a continuity factor in the execution of development projects between incumbent development interventionists and their successors. Generally, the key elements of successful community-driven development projects have been identified to be participation, sustainability, social inclusion and enabling policy environment (Dahl-Ostergaard et al., 2003).

One major problem frequently encountered in rural communities is that of leaders not conceding decision-making roles to other people especially in different development project situations. Some feel they could perform effectively in all situations thereby arrogating the roles of initiators, legitimizers, planners and executors to themselves alone for all projects. Community leadership structure should not be 'closed' despite the observation by Wall et al. (2005) that the socioeconomic status of people often limits their access to the decision-making process, excluding them from community affairs. Williams (1989) posits that by striving to involve new people in the leadership structure of a community, one may introduce new ideas and reach a broader segment of the community.

In the light of this, it is necessary to investigate community power structure, find out how 'open' or 'close' it is, and to understand how decisions are made for successful execution of development projects. However, this could be specific for different communities, depending on the size and complexity of such communities; Kaufman (1975) stresses that the larger the community the greater the structural differentiation and thus the less centralized the community leadership.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The specific objectives to be pursued in this study are to (1) identify the local leaders in the community under investigation; (2) determine the personal characteristics of these leaders; (3) determine the various roles, influence and contributions of these leaders in the various aspects of decision-making; and (4) determine the level of participation of the leaders in development projects.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The study was conducted in Ajaawa, a typical Yoruba semi-urban community which is

also the headquarter of Ogo-Oluwa Local Government Area of Oyo State in Nigeria. It is located in a derived Savannah zone. The major occupation of the inhabitants is arable crop farming. Preliminary investigation through the use of informants yielded the list of formal/positional leaders through whom other leaders were discovered. The final list of 60 respondents were drawn to include both the visible and the concealed leaders. The concealed leaders were selected based on the frequency of mention by both the visible leaders and non-leaders in the community. A total of 60 respondents (leaders) were finally interviewed with the aid of validated interview schedule in the month of July, 2004. Data were collected on the personal characteristics of the respondents such as age, duration of stay in present abode, educational status, marital status, and primary occupation. Leadership categories and the community development projects participated in were identified. Level of participation in CD projects was measured by scoring items of participation, adding them up for each respondent and measuring on a 3-point scale of high, medium and low levels of participation. The items of participation were (1) attendance at meetings (2) Frequency of contribution at meetings (3) attendance at project sites (4) serving on project committees, (5) payment of levies, (6) donation of cash, materials, or both, (7) Self labour, and (8) participation at launching.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

#### *Personal Characteristics of the Leaders:*

Twenty percent of the respondents were female while 90% were married (Table 1). About one-third were between 51 and 60 years old while about 8% were between 31 – 40 years. This shows that leadership qualities are not the exclusive preserve of a particular sex or age group. The mean age of 53 years however indicates that most of the leaders were still agile and active enough to move the community forward. About 88% of the leaders were literate. This attribute could enhance the quality of decisions taken and facilitate the understanding of crucial decision-making issues. The data in Table 1 show that four categories of leaders were identified. These were leaders of social groups (36.7%), political groups (16.7%), religious groups (30%), and traditional title holders (38.3%). These

**Table 1: Personal Characteristics of the respondents (n=60)**

Characteristics	Freq-	Perce- ency ntag
<i>Age (yrs)</i>		
31 – 40	5	8.3
41 – 50	16	26.7
51 – 60	20	33.3
> 60	19	31.7
<i>Duration of Residence (yrs)</i>		
< 10	3	5.0
10 – 20	9	15.0
21 – 30	8	13.3
31 – 40	24	40.0
41 – 50	11	18.4
> 50	5	8.3
<i>Level of Education</i>		
No formal education	7	11.7
Adult education classes	8	13.3
Primary education	6	10.0
Secondary education	19	31.7
Post secondary	20	33.3
<i>Primary Occupation</i>		
Farming	16	26.7
Teaching/civil service	21	35.0
Trading	18	30.0
Others	5	8.3
<i>Marital Status</i>		
Married	54	90.0
Single	3	5.0
Widowed	3	5.0
<i>Leadership Category*</i>		
Social	33	36.7
Political	10	16.7
Traditional	23	38.3
Religion	18	30.0

Source: Field survey, 2004

\*Multiple response

categories transverse the whole community hence, mobilization of majority of the community residents would be enhanced.

**Decision-making Areas:** Table 2 lists the major areas where leaders frequently make decisions for the smooth running of the community. These were identified as matters concerning religion, chieftaincy, community development projects for the socio-economic development of the community and community safety. Community development had the highest proportion (81.7%) of leaders partaking its decision-making followed by community safety (70%).

The matter of religion is a very sensitive aspect of our life in Nigeria. Religious issues handled by community leaders include location of new worship houses, outdoor crusades and nipping of religious crises in the bud. About 47% of the leaders interviewed participated frequently in decision-making on religious issues. Thirty

**Table 2: Areas of Decision-making in the community**

Areas*	Freq- uency	Perce- ntag
Religion	28	46.7
Chieftaincy matters	18	30.0
Community devpt projects	49	81.7
Community safety	42	70.0

Source: Field survey, 2004

\* Multiple response

percent participate frequently in decision-making involving chieftaincy matters. Issues thrashed include which families produce the next set of candidates for specific traditional titles, people who deserve ceremonial titles of the community and settlement of disputes between chieftaincy combatants. The overriding objective here is the 'expansion' of the leadership clique and this depends very much on whether the local leadership realize that identifying and training of potential leaders is part of rural community development efforts, as observed by Winter et al. (1989). From the few (30%) of them that parti-cipated frequently in this matter, the leadership structure tends to be 'closed'. In the matter of community safety, decisions were made in this area concerning screening, recruitment, training and placement of safety vanguards, popularly called 'vigilante'. They are to safeguard the community from armed marauders. Seventy percent of the leaders took part regularly in making decisions in this area.

**Community Development:** This area commands the attention of 81.7% of the leaders. It is an area that involves the socio-economic progress of the community, usually through conception, planning and execution of development projects, particularly physical infrastructure.

The purpose of community leadership is to provide guidance for community development which comes about through planning and execution of projects. Table 3 indicates the development projects embarked upon in the last 5 years in the community. These include repair of township roads (on-going), rehabilitation of school buildings (completed), construction of the King's (Oba's) palace (completed), town hall (uncompleted), National Youth Service Corpers Lodge (completed) and construction of a new central market (completed). Actualization of these projects involved decision-making by community leaders and Table 3 further indicates the proportion of leaders that took active part in the decision-making concerning the projects. Construction of

the central market commanded attention from the highest proportion (71.7%) while building of the Youth Corpers' lodge had the least (18.3%) of leaders. This may indicate that the leaders participated most in projects that were of immediate perceived benefits to them.

**Table 3: Projects Participated in through decision-making (last 5 years)**

Projects*	Freq- uency	Percent- age
Road construction	23	38.3
School development	12	20.0
Palace	38	63.3
Town hall	32	53.3
NYSC lodge	11	18.3
Market	43	71.7

Source: Field survey, 2004

\* Multiple response

**Decision-making Issues in Community Development Projects:** Table 4 outlays some of the crucial issues of decision-making in the community as participated in by community leaders. The major issues identified common to the development projects were mobilization of people, planning meetings, finance, and linkage with other organizations.

People mobilization involved sensitization and raising of awareness level of the people about the particular project in order to enlist their support for successful execution. Leaders were involved right from the ward level in the mobilization of their subjects. However, the involvement of the leaders largely depended on the conviction about the necessity for, or the immediate usefulness of, such projects to the people. The figures show a commitment of most of the leaders to the selected four major projects. The palace had the highest proportion (78.9%) in terms of people mobilization. The market project took a lead in the area of participation at

**Table 4: Leadership responsibility areas**

Projects	People mobili- zation (n=32)		Meetings (n=38)		Finance (n=32)		Linkage (n=43)	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Town hall	22	68.8	8	34.8	9	26.3	16	37.2
Roads	16	69.6	10	43.8	13	34.2	7	16.3
Palace	30	78.9	16	69.6	22	57.9	12	27.9
Market	28	65.1	21	91.3	30	78.9	28	65.1

Source: Field survey, 2004

planning meetings (91.3%), finance (78.9%) and linkage (65.1%). Obviously, the market project would touch on everybody while uplifting the economic prospects of the community. Linkage has to do with liaison with external people or organizations in soliciting for financial and material support for the project at hand. It should be noted that participation depended on the choice of the leaders as members of relevant sub-committees. It may also depend on the eagerness of the leaders to serve which is dictated by the perceived relevance and benefits of the project in question. Membership of sub-committees varied in size depending on the task at hand. However, all leaders should join hands to execute the decisions taken by the sub-committees.

**Participation of Leaders in the Projects:**

Actual participation of the leaders in the execution of the projects could be a strong indicator for the participation of the subjects. The various aspects of participation identified included financial and material contributions through levies and voluntary donations, pre- and post-execution launchings, physical involvement through personal labor. Table 5 outlines the percentages of leaders that participated in the various aspects of each project. In the payment of levies the market project commanded the highest (96.7%) followed by the palace (90%). About the voluntary donation to projects, the palace project commanded the highest donors (23.3%), followed by the market (18.3%). On the contribution of self labour, the palace was highest (48.3), followed by the market (41.7%). At the pre and post launching activities, the market had the largest patronage from leaders (88.3%), followed by the palace (55%). Overall, the palace and the market were the favoured projects of the leaders.

**Table 5: Areas of participation**

Projects	Levy		Donation		Self labour		Launch- ing	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Town hall	42	70.0	8	15.0	22	36.7	28	46.7
Roads	31	51.7	6	10.0	16	26.7	17	28.3
Palace	54	90.0	13	23.3	29	48.3	32	55.0
Market	58	96.7	11	18.3	25	41.7	53	88.3

Source: Field survey, 2004

**Level of Participation:** The levels of participation were obtained through careful computation, and the result is shown in Table 6. The central market project commanded the

**Table 6: Level of participation**

Projects	High level (%)	Medium level (%)	Low level (%)
Town hall	44.5	38.2	17.3
Roads	28.8	31.5	39.7
Palace	63.0	24.2	12.8
Market	72.0	25.5	2.5

Source: Data analysis, 2004

highest proportion (72%) of leaders at 'high' level of participation followed by the palace (63%). Road rehabilitation elicited the least interest with a majority of 39.7% of leaders participating at the 'low' level.

### CONCLUSION

This project reveals that the task of running a community is a collective one by the entire power structure through the decision-making process. Even though specific roles are assigned, the satisfactory performance of such individual roles at the right time moves the community forward. The most participatory and frequent decisions were taken in respect of 'community development projects' especially those that would obviously uplift the socio-economic lives of individuals. Collective decision-making would overshadow the individual inadequacies in terms of personal bias, illiteracy and others which may hinder sound judgment.

### REFERENCES

Center for Africa Settlement Studies and Development (CASSAD): Non-Government Organizations in Nigerian Communities: A Critical Evaluation of their Characters, Achievements and Potentials for Social and Economic Development: *Summary of the Study Report*, 25-26 (1992).

- Coe, B. A.: Open focus: A Model of Community Development. *Journal of the Community Development Society*, **21(2)**: 20-35 (1990).
- Dahl-Ostergaard, T., Moore, D., Ramirez, V., Wenner, M. and Bonde, A.: Community-driven Rural Development: What Have We Learned. Inter-American Development Bank, Washington D. C. Sustainable Development Department Technical Papers Series; RUR-112, (2003). [<http://www.Iadb.Org/sds/>]
- Ekong, E. E.: *Rural Sociology, an Introduction and Analysis of Rural Nigeria*. Dove Educational Publishers, Uyo. Second Edition, pp. 8-62, (2003).
- Fear, F. A., Vandenburg, L., Thullen, M., and Williams, B.: Toward a Literature based Framework for Community Leadership Development. *Paper presented at the Annual meeting of the Community Development Society*, Logan, UT, (1985).
- Flora, C. B., Flora, J. L., and Fey, S.: *Rural Communities: Legacy and Change*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. CO: Westview Press, pp. 34-67 (2004).
- Jackman, R. 1987. Political Institutions and Voter Turnout in Industrialized Democracies. *American Political Science Review*, **81**: 405-423 (1987).
- Jibowo, A. A. 1992. *Essentials of Rural Sociology*. Gbemi Shodipo Press Ltd., Abeokuta, Nigeria, pp.180-201 (1992).
- Kaufman, H. F.: Community Influentials: Power Figures or Leaders? *Journal of the Community Development Society*, **6(1)**: 75 (1975).
- Van den Ban, A. W. and Hawkins, H. S. 1996. *Agricultural Extension*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Blakwel Science Ltd., Oxford, p. 280 (1996).
- Wall, L. J., Pettibone, T. J. and Kelsey, K. D.: The Impact of Socioeconomic Status on leadership Potential in an Agricultural Leadership Program. *Journal of Southern Agricultural Education Research*, **55(1)**: 17-24 (2005).
- Williams, M. R.: A Model for Deploying Rural Leadership in Community Economic Development. Southern Rural Sociological Association, Nashville, TN (1989).
- Winter, M. D., Slogget, G. R., Doekson, G. A. and Sanders, L. D.: *Guidebook for Rural Economic Development Training*. Southern Rural Development Centre, Mississippi. (1989)