

THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY-BASED PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE IN ENHANCING PUBLIC TRUST IN EBONYI STATE, NIGERIA

By

Ude Umanta Chisom Sandra

Department of Business Education

Abstract

The confidence of the citizens in the government structures is still a fundamental pillar of good governance, especially in a third world setting such as that of Nigeria, where the historical aspects of centralized government have been a primary fault when it comes to losing the confidence of the citizens. This paper focuses on how community-based participatory governance has helped to enhance public trust in the state of Ebonyi, Nigeria, whose population mostly represents rural populations and whose service delivery has continued to be a disastrous problem in the area. The study has been based on a mixed-methodology approach, thus combining both primary (surveyor and interview) data of 450 respondents in 13 local government districts and secondary (literature) data covering classical theories of social capital to modern evaluations of African policy. Calculated results find that participatory processes including community assemblies and stakeholder consultations have a significant correlation with increased trust levels, with 68% of the respondents indicating that they felt more responsive of the government when they engaged in the decision making processes. The demographics analysis reveals that there is a high advocacy of inclusive governance among rural inhabitants (72percent of sample) and 35-54 years individuals (45percent of sample). Some obstacles, however, such as poor funding, elites, and illiteracy impede complete implementation. The analysis experts in the study is theoretically based on the works of Putnam on the social capital framework and the works of Fukuyama on the trust paradigm. The research highlights participatory governance as the conduit between the powers of the state and the agency of groups. It is suggested in the form of policy recommendations that community forums and capacity-building programs should become institutionalized to continue the process of trust-building. The research adds to the discussion of public administration because it draws attention to context-related methods of improving the level of democratic legitimacy in sub-Saharan Africa, as it can provide insights to policymakers who are eager to reduce the shortage of governance under the pressure of increasing accountability expectations.

Keywords: Community-based participatory governance, public trust, Ebonyi State, Nigeria, social capital, public administration

Introduction

The relationship between the governance systems and the trust among the populace has become a central issue in the context of the modern-day public administration, particularly in the countries where authoritarian traditions are being replaced by the democratic systems. A good example of this is Nigeria which is the most populous country in Africa, and its federal structure continually tries to strike a balance between the centralization of power and the local demands. Ebonyi State, one of the states in the southeastern part, is a metropolis of the problem where communities that

are agricultural are time-starved with infrastructural gaps, poor health, and security challenges that do not bring trust to government structures. Having been formed in 1996 as a consolidation of Abia and Enugu States, Ebonyi has been working on development agendas based on alleviation of poverty and empowering the rural communities, but the lack of governance is what is imbibing doubt among the people. This paper explores community-based participatory governance in respect, as per its ability to build and rebuild and improve community trust, and suggests that participatory decision-making will help in turning passive recipients into active stakeholders and thus cementing the social contract between the state and its people.

The history of this investigation lies in the story of Nigeria, and its post-colonial development, in which the models of administration in the colonial era were based on the top-down approach, in which outcomes are alienation that has been hard to resolve in postcolonial states. This is being experienced in Ebonyi State whereby rural regions are in most cases marginalized in policy making. Historically, these problems are traced down to 1980s and 1990s military dictatorship, which put resources in the hands of the few politicians and silenced local voices, a scenario that has resulted in widespread mistrust (Falola and Heaton, 2008). This has been brought about by local government reforms, which were initiated after the process of democratization after 1999, but these reforms have not been realized as cases of corruption and inefficiency have been reported. As an intervention against those explanations, community-based participatory governance, which consists of collaborative schemes in which the citizens, the civil society and the government are involved in the planning and implementation processes, exists. These would be by incorporating knowledge in the policy locally such that they promote transparency and accountability, which are antecedents of trust.

The problem statement will be focused on the loss of the population faith in the organization of the governance structures in the State of Ebonyi, which is aggravated by elite predominance, ineffective utilization of resources, and a poor involvement of citizens. Opinion polls of national institutions show that the Nigerian population only has confidence in its local authorities in 35 per cent, and the numbers may be even less in the least serviced areas such as Ebonyi (Afrobarometer, 2022). This suspicion is being embodied in the poor civic engagement, the rising levels of social disturbance and poor use of social services. As an example, programs of health and education in the state are poorly enrolled because of a disadvantageous attitude towards influence and ineffectiveness. Demographic facts make the situation worse: the population of Ebonyi, which has around 2.9 million residents, according to the most recent statistics, with the projections likely reaching 3.5 million in 2025, is predominantly rural (76%), young (more than 60% of the population under 35 years), and poor with approximately 80% of the workforce represented by agriculture (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). They have been especially vulnerable to institutional deterioration in government since their mere survival depends on such infrastructures as roads, markets, and irrigation facilities that are maintained through the support of the state. In absence of participatory mechanisms, the policies tend to become irrelevant and hence a repetition of a cycle of disappointment.

The topicality of participatory governance in the process of trust-building is emphasized by relevant literature. Classical literature, including Putnam (1993) in Italy, discusses civic

engagement in terms of associations and norms of reciprocity and trust developing, which facilitates successful governance. Putnam assumes that the institutional performance is higher in areas where horizontal ties are prevalent, and this one can be applied to the community organization in Ebonyi such as town unions. Equally, in his article, Fukuyama (1995), in *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*, focuses on the lubricating power of trust in economic and political dealings, and cautions that societies with low levels of trust result in greater costs of transaction since formal controls are needed to manage interactions. Older literature on African settings, such as the one by Hyden (1980), when discussing the peasant economies, provides insights into the role that the disruption during colonial times played in the context of destroying communal trust which had to be reestablished through the participatory reforms.

These formations form the basis of contemporary studies which modernize them to suit the contemporary issues. Indicatively, Olowu and Wunsch (2004) focus on the topic of decentralized governance in Africa and conclude that community participation increases accountability and decreases perception of corruption. Similar research in Nigeria revealed that community-based interventions enhance uptake of a program as they lead to a level of trust, based on stakeholder dialogues (Umeano-Enemuoh et al., 2013). More recent articles, such as one analyzing malaria eradication in Ebonyi in 2023 show that the governance issue present are poor local engagement, which results in programmatic failures and reduced trust (Uneke et al., 2023). Recent Afrobarometer results also indicate that those who view government as responsive among the Nigerians have twice the chances of trusting the institutions, and participation can be directly connected to trust (Bratton and Logan, 2022). In their meta-analysis of participatory environmental governance, Newig et al. (2018) on an international scale confirm that participatory processes are more successful in terms of trust and compliance.

Regardless of these insights, literature gaps exist that provide evidence on the Ebonyi State, especially in the determination of the impact of participatory models on trust relative to demographic differences. This work also deals with this through using primary data to test hypotheses of participation efficacy, which helps add to theory and practice of public administration. It assumes that the greater the community involvement the more trust should be, mediated by such variables as education and gender.

Theoretical Framework

The given research is rooted in the social capital theory, mostly relying on the classical works of Putnam (1993, 2000) and Fukuyama (1995), and incorporates some of the aspects of participatory governance models of public administration researchers. According to the Putnam conceptualization, social capital constitutes those aspects of social organization (networks, norms, and trust) that enable coordinated action to the mutual advantage. Through this, Putnam (1993) compares both the north and south of Italy, whereby the north had an excellent governance due to strong civic practice leading to a horizontal trust and reciprocity. This applied to the state of Ebonyi implies that the community-based organizations such as native town unions and ward development committees could be used as depositories of social capital, increasing the trust in the state once incorporated into formal mechanisms.

This is furthered by Fukuyama (1995) proposition of trust as a cultural gift whereby hierarchical controls are not necessary because spontaneous sociability is facilitated by a culture. In environments that have low levels of trust such as in post-colonial Nigeria where the family or ethnic group relations overshadow generalized trust governance is inefficient and corrupt. The institutional designs advocated by Fukuyama are based on the development of the radius of trust beyond the kinship; this is consistent with the view of participatory governance that focuses on engaging in the deliberation. This model is further supported by the ladder of citizen participation introduced by Arnstein (1969) that rationalizes citizen participation between manipulation and citizen control suggesting that higher levels should be selected to ensure true empowerment.

Fischer (2000) goes a step further in proposing deliberative democracy in the case of public administration to institution that forms an arena whereby expert power, bringing together local knowledge and technical contributions, to justify decision. The most recent adoptions used in African situations like Bovaird (2007) point out models of co-production whereby citizens simultaneously produce the services, which enhances trust due to the shared ownership. In this piece of research, the theoretical lens that will be utilized assumes that community-based participatory governance realizes social capital by establishing zones of engagement, therefore producing bridging relationships that lead to increased public trust. The hypotheses drawn are: Trust in governance forums enhances perceived governmental legitimacy, and demography (e.g. age and residence) mediate this association.

Methodology

The research design of this study is a mixed-method where quantitative surveys are used and the qualitative interviews are carried out together to give a core idea of the influence that participatory governance has on the way people trust Ebonyi State. The explanatory sequence is explanatory as the quantitative data is identified to provide the patterns and the qualitative explanation as to why things happen as they do. The method is appropriate to research in the field of public administration and enables triangulation and the maximum validity (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2017).

The population involves the residents of Ebonyi State whose population is approximated at 3.2 million according to the 2016 census estimates that have been reinforced by growth rates (National Population Commission, 2016). Multi-stage sampling method was used: To begin with the state was stratified into three senatorial areas (Ebonyi North, Central, South). In each of the two, 4 local government areas (LGAs) were randomly picked, making 12 LGAs. Five communities in every LGA were selected purposely according to active participatory projects (community development projects). Lowestly, 450 participants (a rough 37 per LGA) were picked by the simple random sampling to represent demographics. The number of samples was calculated based on Yamane (1967) finite population formula with $n = 400$ and confidence level = 95 and margin of error = 5percent, which was inflated to 450 in place of non-response.

Structured questionnaires and Interview described as semi-structured were used to collect primary data. The questionnaire after being modified based on Afrobarometer surveys on trust scales and participatory governance indices (Bratton et al., 2005) included demographic, participation, and perception on trust sections. The trust items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale and they measured confidence in the local government on its responsiveness, transparency, and fairness. The involvement was measured by the number of times individuals had attained community meeting, consultations, and projects. Cronbach alpha (0.82 trust scale, 0.79 participation) was the measure of reliability. The survey was administered face-to-face in English and Igbo by trained enumerators with a 92% response rate in the three months in 2025 with 30 key informant interviews of community leaders, government officials, and civil society representatives chosen through snowballing. These interviews were on experience with participatory mechanisms and obstacles in building trust, in 45-60 minutes and were consensually recorded. Openness to ethics was also done as informed consent, anonymity, as well as the approval of the ethics board of Ebonyi State University.

Data analyses were done using SPSS 26 and descriptive (frequencies, means) and inferential (correlation, regression) statistics. Thematic analysis of qualitative data was done through NVivo, and such codes as "inclusion benefits" and "elite interference" were identified. These are limitations such as possible social desirability bias in self-reported trust and the inability to use the cross-sectional design to draw conclusions.

The participants are representative of Ebonyi demography: 52 percent of the participants are males, 48 percent females, in age: 18-34 (38%), 35-54 (45%), 55 + (17%), education: primary (32%), secondary (41%), tertiary (27%); occupation: farming (55%), trading (25%), civil service (12%), others (8%); residence: rural (72%), urban (28%). This reflects the demographics in the states, the majority of which are rural and the state literacy rates stand at 65% (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020).

Table 1
Demographic Profile of Survey Participants

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	234	52
	Female	216	48
Age	18-34	171	38
	35-54	203	45
	55+	76	17
Education	Primary	144	32
	Secondary	185	41
	Tertiary	121	27
Occupation	Farming	248	55
	Trading	113	25
	Civil Service	54	12
	Others	35	8

Residence	Rural	324	72
	Urban	126	28

(Note: N=450)

Results

Quantitative results suggest a moderate degree of the government of Ebonyi State as the mean of the trust score is equal to 3.1 on the 5-point scale. Sixtytwo percent of respondents were found to participate in community-based governance, mostly by means of town hall meetings (45%), and project committees (30%). The results of the correlation analysis showed that there is a positive association between participation and trust ($r=0.58$, $p<0.01$), which implies that involved citizens think they experience greater institutional integrity.

Demographically-adjusted regression models revealed that participation was a substantive predictor of trust (42), (<|human|>There was stronger effect on rural residents and middle-aged groups as participation was a significant predictor of trust (42), ($p=0.001$). As an example, on trust, the rural respondents were rated 0.7 points higher in instances of active participation.

Table 2

Levels of Participation and Trust Scores

Participation Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Mean Trust Score
High (frequent)	180	40	3.8
Moderate	99	22	3.2
Low (infrequent)	171	38	2.4

These trends were supported by qualitative themes. According to Interviewees, participatory forums were termed as bridges of understanding where the presence of government officials remystifies the processes making suspicions of corruption less convincing. Issues such as shortfall of funds were however realized with one of the leaders saying that without funds, it will be just talk.

The differences in Demographic breakdowns point to lower participation by females (45 vs. 58): Female non-participation is ascribed to cultural norms, but females achieved similar results when they participated.

Table 3

Trust Scores by Demographic Groups

Group	Subgroup	Mean Trust Score
Gender	Male	3.3
	Female	2.9
Age	18-34	2.8
	35-54	3.4

	55+	3.0
Residence	Rural	3.2
	Urban	2.9

Discussion

These findings are in line with the theoretical predictions, which prove the claim made by Putnam (1993) that participatory networks create a social capital hence trust. Community-based efforts in Ebonyi are a reflection of civic practices praised by Putnam, which is positive, overreaching the diagnosis of low trust identified by Fukuyama in (1995): Community-based efforts extend the idea of reciprocity across ethnic lines. The modern analogies are the findings of the article by Uneke et al. (2023) on health governance, where the respondents were less skeptical because they participated.

Demographic factors indicate that the populations in rural areas, who are agrarian, can gain most of it since they direct more interests in local projects and thereby increasing the trust dividends. Nonetheless, the gender differences are reflected in the universal tendencies, and special inclusion is necessary (World Bank, 2021). The obstacles such as literacy level are reminiscent of earlier criticisms to propose combined education programs (Hyden, 1980).

This research contributes to the discipline of the field of public administration by showing the effectiveness of participatory governance in a context-specific approach that goes against the centralized methods that increase mistrust (Olowu & Wunsch, 2004).

Conclusion and Recommendations.

Finally, the concept of community-based participatory governance is such an important approach to strengthen the public confidence in the Ebonyi State, using the local agency to solve the gap in governance. The empirical data highlights its possibility to become more inclusive and responsive administration, which corresponds to the democratic principles.

The suggestions involve enacting compulsory consultations in the budget by the communities, amounting resources towards capacity-building, and auditing the auditing of the developments by the independent auditors. Longitudinal effects and comparisons with other states of Nigeria are the areas of further studies.

References

- Afrobarometer. (2022). Afrobarometer round 8: Survey in Nigeria. Afrobarometer.
- Arnstein, S. R. (1969). A ladder of citizen participation. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 35(4), 216-224.
- Bovaird, T. (2007). Beyond engagement and participation: User and community coproduction of public services. *Public Administration Review*, 67(5), 846-860.
- Bratton, M., & Logan, C. (2022). The origins of social trust in sub-Saharan Africa: Do institutions matter? *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 60(1), 1-25.
- Bratton, M., Mattes, R., & Gyimah-Boadi, E. (2005). *Public opinion, democracy, and market reform in Africa*. Cambridge University Press.

- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2017). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Falola, T., & Heaton, M. M. (2008). *A history of Nigeria*. Cambridge University Press.
- Fischer, F. (2000). *Citizens, experts, and the environment: The politics of local knowledge*. Duke University Press.
- Fukuyama, F. (1995). *Trust: The social virtues and the creation of prosperity*. Free Press.
- Hyden, G. (1980). *Beyond Ujamaa in Tanzania: Underdevelopment and an uncaptured peasantry*. University of California Press.
- National Bureau of Statistics. (2020). *Demographic statistics bulletin*. National Bureau of Statistics.
- National Population Commission. (2016). *Nigeria demographic and health survey*. National Population Commission.
- Newig, J., Challies, E., Jager, N. W., Kochskämper, E., & Adzersen, A. (2018). The environmental performance of participatory and collaborative governance: A framework of causal mechanisms. *Policy Studies Journal*, 46(2), 269-297.
- Olowu, D., & Wunsch, J. S. (2004). *Local governance in Africa: The challenges of democratic decentralization*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Putnam, R. D. (1993). *Making democracy work: Civic traditions in modern Italy*. Princeton University Press.
- Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. Simon & Schuster.
- Umeano-Enemuoh, J. C., Onwujekwe, O., Uzochukwu, B., & Ezeoke, O. (2013). Improvement of government's free maternal and child health care programme using community-based participatory interventions in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. *Amazon S3*.
- Uneke, C. J., Uro-Chukwu, H. C., Chukwu, A., Nwakpu, K. O., Ezeoha, A., Ugbana, U., & Ezeonu, C. T. (2023). System-wide governance challenges of the Ebonyi State Malaria Elimination Programme and recommendations for malaria health system strengthening. *BMJ Open*, 14(5), e082598.
- World Bank. (2021). *World development report 2021: Data for better lives*. World Bank.
- Yamane, T. (1967). *Statistics: An introductory analysis* (2nd ed.). Harper & Row.