



COMMUNITY-CENTRED ASSESSMENT APPROACHES AND INCLUSIVE SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION IN CALABAR MUNICIPALITY LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study examined the impact of community-based evaluation strategies on inclusive social change in Calabar Municipal Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. Guided by two objectives and corresponding research questions, a descriptive survey design was adopted. Data were collected using a structured instrument, the Community-Centred Assessment and Social Transformation Questionnaire (CCASTQ), developed by the researchers. Experts in Measurement and Evaluation validated the instrument, while reliability testing using Cronbach Alpha yielded coefficients of 0.78, 0.83, and 0.86, indicating strong internal consistency. Data were analysed using multiple linear regression at a 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that community assessment surveys significantly contribute to successful social transformation projects by enhancing relevance, ownership, and sustainability. Community-generated quantitative data were also found to be effective in improving programme outcomes by providing credible, context-sensitive evidence for planning, monitoring, and evaluation. Additionally, participatory approaches promoted accountability, inclusiveness, and sustainability in

development interventions. The study concluded that active community involvement in assessment and data generation strengthens transparency and project outcomes, leading to inclusive social transformation. It is recommended that government and development organizations institutionalize community-based assessments, build local data generation capacity, and integrate participatory mechanisms throughout project planning and evaluation processes.

Keywords: Community-centred assessment, inclusive social transformation, participatory evaluation, community-generated data

Introduction

The emergence of community-based evaluation strategies has become a revolution that encourages inclusiveness and involvement in development in the local system of governance. These strategies focus on the active participation of the community members in the process of defining, assessing, and prioritising the social needs, thus making sure that the development programmes are based on the local realities and aspirations. The participation-based assessment is a global phenomenon associated with an increased awareness of the fact that sustainable social transformation cannot be implemented solely by top-down policy interventions but by the processes that enable communities to co-fashion and self-monitor solutions to their developmental problems (Pereira et al. 2021; Dushkova & Ivlieva, 2024). In this regard, instead of being a technical process, assessment is a social process of inclusion, dialogue, and group learning.

In the given case, community assessment surveys, specifically, are aimed at collecting quantitative and qualitative data that portray the lived experiences of individuals and groups within a community. Such statistics are essential to design and implement inclusive social initiatives, in particular, where social inequality and marginalisation are the features (Qureshi et al. 2025). Community assessments, as effective tools are also used as feedback mechanisms that help get government initiatives in line with the priorities of citizens and give concrete evidence of the outcomes of social transformation (Sonnenfeld et al., 2024). This has been implemented in most developing areas, including sub-Saharan Africa, where it has been used to enhance local governance, better resource allocation and accountability in the social provision of services (Ogentho et al. 2021).

In Nigeria, the debate on community-based evaluation has become more relevant in the context of endemic social inequality, level of development and governance at the local government levels. In the past, the plans of national development and social programmes financed by donors have failed to deliver the desired results because communities were not involved in their development and execution (Musyoki et al. 2021). Consequently, there is an increasing call towards participatory frameworks through which communities are not only able to communicate their developmental requirements, but also produce data, which are used to drive decision-making. These strategies are based on the principles of inclusivity and empowerment to change the dynamics between the government institutions and the individuals who receive the delivered services (Ahmad & Islam, 2024).

Inclusive social transformation is a concept that describes the process that allows societies to attain equitable social progress by making sure that marginalised groups, including women, young people, individuals with disabilities, and poor households, are reasonably included in the decision-making process and gain equally in development activities (Popova 2020). This is a community-based transformation that focuses on collective ownership and responsibility. It is a community-centred assessment that will, therefore, provide the measurement of, monitor, and maintain inclusive transformation. It makes it possible to generate local data reflecting the peculiarities of the needs of communities, social relations, and the priorities of the development (Banda 2025).

Community-based data collection projects have been undertaken using community development associations, traditional councils, and the local government department in the Nigerian context. Nevertheless, the efficiency of these measures in shaping social change is low because of inadequate institutional designs, bad quality data, and the absence of feedback to be integrated into the policy implementation (Omweri 2024). As an example, most social intervention programmes, for instance, poverty alleviation programmes, youth empowerment programmes and health campaigns are usually based on externally generated data which lacks the local needs. Subsequently, this lack of alignment between the programme design and the realities of the community leads to unsustainability and disillusionment of the population (Data 2019).

Quantitative data created by communities offer an empirical basis for the assessment of the quantifiable effects of social transformation projects. Communities will be able to determine priority needs, evaluate the project outcomes, and hold implementing agencies to account using tools like household surveys, participatory mapping, and social audits. Research has revealed that when communities participate in data creation, the outcomes of projects become more applicable, effective, and fair (Harrington et al. 2019). As an illustration, during rural development programmes in Kenya and Tanzania, participatory assessment ensured better ownership of the project and an increase in its monitoring effectiveness, resulting in higher sustainability rates (Warinda et al. 2020). In Nigeria, the practice is, however, still uneven among the local government areas. Whereas, in certain municipalities, participatory methods are used in health, education, and sanitation endeavours, in other instances, municipalities still carry out their operations using top-down evaluations through consultants or other agencies (Devkar et al. 2019).

Community-based assessment in the Calabar Municipality Local Government Area of Cross River State is especially essential because of the socio-economic diversity and uneven development pattern in the area. The neighbourhood consists of urban and semi-urban communities that have different access to social services, including healthcare, education, and sanitation. Although there are several governmental and non-governmental social transformation programmes, there are still great gaps in the inclusiveness and sustainability of the developmental outcomes (Al Mokdad 2025). Those involved in community projects tend to complain about their lack of participation in the process of project assessment, the lack of feedback systems, and their inability to understand how the assessment results impact their policy (When & Almomani, 2019). These circumstances show the necessity of a more participatory assessment model where

communities are in the centre of data gathering, data analysis and data use to transform social life.

Community-centred assessment is theoretically based on the participatory development theory, which asserts participation as people being agents and beneficiaries of their development (Jung 2020). The theory assumes that authentic participation in assessment and planning will yield a fairer result due to the fact that it incorporates the local knowledge, cultural values, and indigenous solutions into the policy-making process. This idea is further supported by the Empowerment Evaluation Model (Jolly and Thompson-Fawcett, 2021), which promotes the idea of evaluation that should enable stakeholders to plan, implement, and evaluate the programmes that will empower them to have more control and influence over the results of development. All these frameworks put forward the view that participation will increase ownership, legitimacy, and accountability, which are some of the conditions that must exist to transform society inclusively.

Although the idea of community-centred assessment has its conceptual and theoretical superiority, it is faced with several challenges that limit its successful implementation into the local government systems in Nigeria. These are small technical capacities of local officials and community facilitators, insufficient funding of participatory data collection, inefficient coordination of local and state agencies, and poor institutionalised mechanisms of data integration in planning processes (Omweri 2024). Furthermore, political interference, corruption and a lack of transparency usually disrupted the credibility of assessment exercises and lowered the level of community trust and engagement (Agu et al. 2024). The anecdotal information in Calabar Municipality is that community members are often consulted when projects are being launched or even when they are being evaluated, but there is little participation in needs assessment or design of the programme. Such a tokenistic kind of participation does not imply the spirit of a community-based approach.

The gap between the theoretical potential of community-centred assessment and the actual application of the stated method in promoting inclusive social change in Calabar Municipality is, therefore, the problem of the study. Despite the various programmes that are implemented in the region, including those addressing poverty reduction and gender empowerment and environmental sustainability, there is very little empirical literature on the role of community-based assessment surveys in inclusive design and implementation (Bachfischer et al. 2023). Moreover, unanswered to a large extent is the correlation between community-created quantitative data and the quantifiable success of such social transformation projects. In the absence of plausible locally based data, policymakers would be tempted to make decisions that are not quite illustrative of the societal reality, thus continuing the cycle of exclusion and inequality.

The other issue at hand that is of utmost concern is the ongoing body of difficulties that hinder the implementation of participatory assessment models. These issues are limited technical literacy of the community members, a lack of funding to carry out participatory activities, and a lack of institutional processes with which community data can be integrated into the local government planning procedures. Consequently, these

programmes on social transformation usually lack accountability, sustainability, and high levels of monitoring. The absence of inclusiveness in the processes of assessment is not only undermining ownership by the community, but it is also increasing the distance between what the government intends to do and what the grassroots expect (Muhdiarta, 2025).

Other empirical studies carried out in other regions of Nigeria, like those conducted by Onyia et al. (2025) in Akwa Ibom State and Chukwudi and Owoh (2024) in Enugu State, have shown that community involvement in project assessment exercises can enhance project sustainability and inclusiveness remarkably. These results indicate that the incorporation of community-based strategies into the assessment activities can trigger the attainment of a significant social transformation. Nevertheless, as in the example of Calabar Municipality, there is inadequate research on how these methods can be applied, what obstacles limit their application, and how community-generated data can affect the results of development. This gap in knowledge is the focal point of the current study.

Although much work has been done on the tenets of the community-centered assessment and how it helps promote an inclusive social change, the contemporary issues of effectively implementing such assessment strategies within the Calabar Municipality cannot be ignored. Inclusion of the community in designing and implementing social programmes has been a well-documented aspect in the literature. The present research aims to address the following research question: Can community-generated quantitative data and important local factors (for example, community engagement, local government patterns, data quality, and institutional capacity) be the reason behind the challenges and obstacles to successful social change with the help of community-focused assessment methods in Calabar Municipality, Cross River State?

Research Questions

1. How does a community assessment survey affect the effectiveness of social transformation projects in Calabar Municipality Local Government Area?
2. What role does community-generated quantitative data play in determining the success of social transformation projects in Calabar Municipality Local Government Area?

Research Hypotheses

1. Community assessment surveys do not play any major role in the effectiveness of social transformation projects within Calabar Municipality Local Government Area.
2. The effectiveness of the social transformation projects in Calabar Municipal Government Area is not significantly affected by the existence of community-generated quantitative data.

Methodology

The research design used was a descriptive survey research design, which was aimed at investigating the impact of community-based assessment methods to promote inclusive social change in the Calabar Municipality Local Government Area of Cross River State,

Nigeria. The design was deemed suitable since it enabled the systematic gathering and analysis of information on a representative sample to explain existing conditions, relationships, and effects among variables with no manipulations and control. The study population was 1,455 community development officers, social workers, and project evaluators in the Calabar Municipality Local Government Area of Cross River State. A total sample of 400 respondents was taken, which is around 27.49 percent of the entire population. The sample was deemed to be sufficient to guarantee the reliability and generalisability of results in the area of the study. The researcher came up with a structured tool called the Community-Centred Assessment and Social Transformation Questionnaire (CCASTQ) to collect data. The questionnaire was divided into two parts that were made to represent the primary aims of the research, for example, the impact of community assessment surveys and community-generated quantitative data on the social transformation projects. The ratings were conducted on a modified four-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (4 points), Agree (3 points), Disagree (2 points), and Strongly Disagree (1 point). Three measurement and evaluation professionals based at the University of Calabar were able to face and content validate the instrument to make it clear, relevant, and able to match the research objectives. Cronbach Alpha method was used to determine the reliability of the instrument, where the coefficients of the three sections were found to be 0.78, 0.83, and 0.86, respectively, which shows that the instrument has a high level of internal consistency. Analysis of data obtained from the respondents was done through multiple linear regression analysis at the level of significance of 0.05, and the results were tabulated with a corresponding interpretation of this to indicate the strength and direction of relationships among the study variables.

Results

Hypothesis one: Community assessment surveys do not have a significant effect on the success of social transformation projects of Calabar Municipality Local Government Area.

Simple linear regression analysis was used to test the hypothesis that community assessment surveys did not have any significant impact on the effectiveness of the social transformation projects within the Calabar Municipality Local Government Area. In this analysis, the predictor variable was community assessment surveys, while the dependent variable was the effectiveness of social transformation projects. Both variables were measured on a continuous scale. As presented in Table 1, the result showed a correlation coefficient ($R = .757$). Furthermore, the adjusted R-squared value ($\text{Adj. } R^2 = .572$) implies that 57.2% percent of the variance in the effectiveness of social transformation projects can be explained by community assessment surveys. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) result showed an F-value of 961.045 with a significance level of $p = .000$. Since the p-value is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, it is concluded that community assessment surveys have a significant influence on the effectiveness of social transformation projects in Calabar Municipality Local Government Area.

Table 1: Multiple regression analysis of the influence of community assessment surveys on the effectiveness of social transformation projects

Model	B	Std error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	5.974	.531		11.253	.000
Community Assessment Surveys	.741	.024	.757	31.001	.000

F-ratio = 961.045*

R = .757

R² = .572Adjusted R² = .572

*Significant at .05 level

Hypothesis two: There is no significant influence of community-generated quantitative data on the effectiveness of social transformation projects in Calabar Municipality Local Government Area

To test the hypothesis that there is no significant influence of community-generated quantitative data on the effectiveness of social transformation projects in Calabar Municipality Local Government Area, multiple linear regression analysis was carried out. In this analysis, the predictor variable was community-generated quantitative data, while the dependent variable was the effectiveness of social transformation projects. Both variables were measured on a continuous scale. As presented in Table 2, the result showed a correlation coefficient (R = .550). Furthermore, the adjusted R-squared value (Adj. R² = .301) implies that 30.1% percent of the variance in the effectiveness of social transformation projects can be explained by community-generated quantitative data. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) result showed an F-value of 310.781 with a significance level of p = .000. Since the p-value is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, it is concluded that community-generated quantitative data have a significant influence on the effectiveness of social transformation projects in Calabar Municipality Local Government Area.

Table 2: Multiple regression analysis of the influence of community-generated quantitative data on the effectiveness of social transformation projects

Model	B	Std error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	11.183	.636		17.578	.000
Community-generated quantitative data	.491	.028	.550	17.629	.000

F-ratio = 310.781*

R = .550

R² = .302, Adjusted R² = .301

*Significant at .05 level

Discussion of Findings

The results of the study demonstrated that the effectiveness of the social transformation projects in Calabar Municipality Local Government Area is highly affected by the community assessment surveys. This implies that community members are more engaged in the process of information delivery when assessment surveys are structured, which makes it more relevant, inclusive, and sustainable to design, implement, and monitor social transformation projects. The needs, priorities, and challenges of the local people can be identified by means of community assessment surveys, and the interventions will be based on the realities of the people they are aimed at. The given finding is consistent with the stance of Edwards-Fapohunda (2024) and Duea et al. (2022), who stated that participatory community assessment increased project ownership and better identified the problem to increase the overall effect of the development initiatives. Due to the ability to incorporate the views of the locals in the evaluation process, project implementers would be in a position to customise strategies that resonated with the local settings, thus enhancing effectiveness and sustainability.

The paper also established that quantitative data generated by the community play a significant role in determining the success of the social transformation project in Calabar Municipality. This result indicates the usefulness of data that is generated by community members in itself as a valid and context-specific source of evidence to use in planning and evaluation. The community-generated information will also have quantifiable information about the social indicators like education, health, sanitation, and livelihood outcomes that can be better monitored and assessed on the project performance. This outcome confirms the thesis of Matlala (2025), who believed that a community-based data collection would make citizens more responsible and help the institutions become more open and responsive in their governance. In the same way, Haldade et al. (2019) observed that participation data systems enhanced the feedback between communities and development actors, which resulted in adaptive project management and better service delivery.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It was concluded on the basis of the findings of the study that community assessment surveys and community-generated quantitative data are important in ensuring the effectiveness of social transformation projects in Calabar Municipality Local Government Area. The research proved that community assessment surveys play a major role in determining the success and sustainability of social transformation efforts because they also make sure that projects are grounded in authentic community needs and priorities. Likewise, community-generated quantitative data were discovered to play a prominent role in the success of the social transformation projects as they can present precise, context-related, and quantifiable evidence with which to plan, monitor, and evaluate projects. These results emphasise the need to use participatory-based data collection and locally based assessments to enhance project design, project implementation, and impact. Altogether, the paper focuses on the fact that effective community engagement in evaluation and data creation reinforces the project ownership,

responsibility, and sustained social change outcomes. Based on the findings, the recommendations were as follows:

1. The use of community assessment surveys ought to be included in the planning and evaluation of projects by the government agencies and development organisations to make sure that interventions are relevant to the local needs.
2. The communities should be empowered by training and capacity-building programmes to create, analyse, and use quantitative data towards decision-making in social transformation projects.
3. The project implementers must develop systems of ongoing engagement with communities to transmit that data-based knowledge of adaptive project management and sustainable development outcomes.
4. Local government policy frameworks must be encouraged to support participatory data collection and community participation as obligatory aspects of every social transformation programme.

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