

Challenges Impeding Public Participation for the Development of Urban Communities in Nigeria

Jiman Chado^{1*}, Foziah Bte Johar² and Muhammad Zayyanu¹

¹Faculty of Built Environment, Urban and Regional Planning Department, Universiti Teknologi, Johor, Malaysia; jimanchado@yahoo.com, danillelamz@yahoo.com

²Centre for Innovative Planning and Development, Faculty of Built Environment, Universiti Teknologi, Johor, Malaysia; b-foziah@utm.my

Abstract

Objectives: To identify the fundamental challenges by examine individual-based factors affecting public participation programme initiated by government for the development of urban economy in traditional cities of developing countries.

Methods/Statistical Analysis: In this study, 344 questionnaires were administered using systematic random sampling to select the participants which comprises of planning officers, traditional leaders, youth leaders and, household heads. Descriptive statistics technique is adopted in data analysis to examine the factors militating against public participation initiated by government for the development of Bida traditional city in Nigeria. **Findings:** Findings reveal that, socio-economic barriers are the most conspicuous and significant impediments affecting citizens to participate in government-based initiative programmes for the development of human communities. Evidences from this study shows that, it is very imperative for enlightening residents of traditional cities about the significance of the programme and their role to guarantee required and expected development in urban economy. This enlightenment could also alleviate the impact of socio-economic factors affecting the programme in developing countries, especially traditional cities.

Applications/Improvement: For a traditional city which requires a relatively high number of redevelopment programmes, effective public participation would facilitate achievement and maintenance of urban development. This study suggests areas of promoting public participation which could be used by the practitioners and law makers in the development of Bida traditional city in Nigeria.

Keywords: Challenges, Nigeria, Public Participation, Traditional Cities

1. Introduction

Public participation is a concept which has been subjected to many social interpretations. Some authors perceive it as a process whereby people act in group to deliberate on direction and outcome of development programmes that will affect them¹⁻³. This paper focuses principally on citizen participation in decision-making process initiated by government for infrastructural planning and development in urban areas. Prior to the role of public participation, it has been used as a tool in planning and developing human communities⁴. However, despite the significant advantages in adopting the programme, many evidences reveal that, there is insignificant public

involvement in participatory process for the development of human communities in the third world countries, especially traditional cities^{5,6}.

A traditional city is described as an urban settlement which developed through human civilization and emerged for many centuries⁷. This implies that, settlements are relatively not plan and lack effective development control mechanisms⁶. These cities perform significant role namely; source of market for rural economy, preservation of cultural heritage, and administrative headquarters of rural communities among others⁸. Earlier studies on the challenges of public participation explored more on institutional-based factors with little attention on individual-based factors⁸⁻¹⁰. However, this paper limits

* Author for correspondence

its study on individual-based factors impeding citizens to participate in a programme initiated by government in urban development. The reasons for examining the individual-based factors are enormous. Firstly, it is a broad impending factor which directly affects citizens to participate in the programme initiated by government. Secondly, it is a bottom-up decision-making process, which invariably requires alleviating factors impeding local residents to participate in the programme¹¹. In this regard, this study is set out to identify the prime challenge impeding public participation by examining the individual-based factors in traditional city of Bida, Nigeria. The next part of the paper examines the legal framework of public participation in planning and development of human environment in Nigeria.

2. Legal Framework and Public Participation in Nigeria

Public participation in urban planning and development is the most visible mechanism for communication around the planning process which play central role in participatory democracy in planning practices^{11,12}. Nigerian Urban and Regional Planning Law Decree No. 88 section 13 and 16 of 1992; and Environmental Impact Assessment Decree No. 86 section 7 of 1992; permit citizens to participation in planning and management of environment. The laws were made to promote collaborative planning between government and citizens^{8,13}. Despite the provision of these laws in Nigerian economy, involvement of citizens in government-based programme is grossly insignificant^{13,14}. In this regard, Public participatory practices are grouped into two categories, namely; statutory and voluntary participation as described below.

Statutory Participation: This participatory practice involves planning and implementation processes via constitutional basis, such as zoning regulation of all scales. This implies that, citizens participate predominately on the aspect of expressing their objections to the proposed plan or policy in the development of human communities. This participation involves ordinary citizens, private sector planners, and NGOs among others. Despite long standing tradition of statutory participation, individuals are still agitating for greater involvement in planning process for the development of their communities. However, government establishment continue to defend themselves by limiting opportunities of citizens to participate in developing countries^{9,14,15}.

Voluntary Participation: This is an informal public participatory practice which resulted from ethical or moral values attached to participation. This participation usually developed unofficially and initiated by citizens, private sector planners, academicians and NGOs. The mechanisms used in the practice of voluntary participation are; public meeting; focus groups, writing in newspapers, internet and other media services. In Nigeria, power sharing in participatory process is yet to be adopted effectively between citizens and government planning agencies¹⁶. In Nigeria, there is need for promoting effective public participation practices in facilitating socio-economic development and environmental management.

3. The Need for Public Participation in Urban Development

The need for public input can be used at many stages in planning and development process. However, need for public participation depends on the purpose that it is serving because, different public inputs may be required form different set of people¹⁷. This implies that, public input requirement in decision-making process may vary with purpose that a programme is designed to achieve for the development of human environment. Studies revealed that, needs for public participation in decision-making process for development could be grouped into two categories, namely; to improve decision-making quality and to improve decision legitimacy¹⁸. This implies that, some needs are related to improving the quality of assessment and decisions making. The need could also be related to making legitimate decision¹⁹. In this regard, when concern and interested citizens are involved and they contribute in decision-making process, it implies that decision is in theory, democratic and invariably becomes legitimate in the course of planning process.

Despite the needs for public engagement and increasing interest by public to participate, there has been insignificant participation by the citizens in the programmes initiated by government. This predicament has been trace to some two broad factors, namely; institutional and local or individual factors. Institutional-based factors are those barriers originate from government, which resulted from constraining factors, namely; lack of adequate consultation with professional bodies, inadequate communication between government and local residents, lack of transparency, and late preparation of programme among others. However, individual-based factors

are those barriers from local residents, namely; cultural, socio-economic, and environmental factors⁸. This implies that, individual-based barrier is directly impeding citizens in participating, and institutional-based is exacerbating individual-based barriers. This is because it reduces citizens' interest to participate, limits access to information, and consequently deteriorating the liberty and integrity of the programme in developing human communities. The study therefore, focused on examining individual-based factors to identify the fundamental factor affecting citizens in the traditional cities of developing countries with particular reference to Bida, Nigeria.

4. Methodology and Study Area

In this study, questionnaire survey instrument was employed in data collection. A total of 344 questionnaires were administered using random sampling method in selecting participants, which comprises of planning officers, traditional leaders, youth leaders, and household heads. In data analysis, descriptive statistics was adopted to analyze the perceptions of people on individual-based factors affecting public participation in Bida traditional city. This ancient city was founded around 15th century in the southern guinea savanna of Nigeria. It has land area of approximately 51km² and population of 178, 840 in 2006 with an estimation of 229, 985 persons in 2012²⁰. The city is about 90 kilometres South West of Minna, the Niger state capital and 340 kilometres North West of Abuja, the Nigeria capital city (Figure 1). In northern Nigeria, the most prominent and conspicuous feature of a traditional city is the city wall, which is built round the delineated urban area. Like other traditional cities, Bida city wall has ten (10) gates. However, prior to the course of time only four gates exist today, namely; Ban-gbogi as the North gate, Ban-gbara as the South gate, Ban-wuya as the West gate, and Ban-gaie as the East gate (Figure 2)²¹.

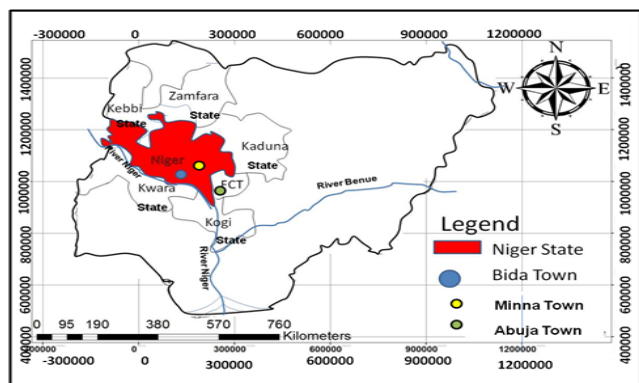


Figure 1. Map of Nigeria showing Niger State and Bida traditional city.

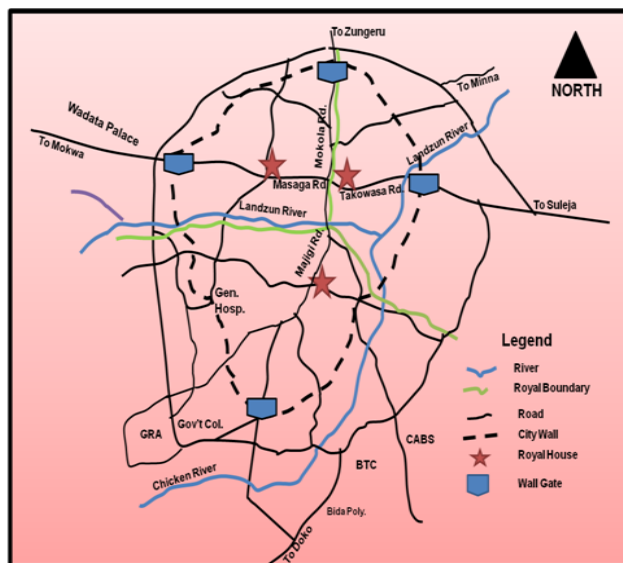


Figure 2. Bida urban area showing four gates, royal boundary, city wall and royal houses.

It is observed that, Bida being a traditional city become difficult to be developed because of some constraining factors. These factors range from the characteristics of origin of settlement development to lack of initial development plan, inadequate development control, and behavioural attitude of inhabitants²². City of this magnitude could be developed through public participation programme initiated by government in developing urban areas. By involving public in decision-making process for planning and development will enable government to know all the conservative problems, needs, aspiration and preference of the people in the urban area. Owing to the reasons why Bida and indeed traditional cities are difficult to be developed, couple with the significance of adopting public participation programme as mentioned above, the needs to identify the challenges impeding citizens to participate in the programme becomes very imperative. The next section discussed the perceptions of citizens on the impeding factors affecting them to participate in decision-making process initiated by government for the development of socio-economic activities and environmental management.

5. Results and Discussion

The results represent perception of citizens on individual-based factors militating against public participation programmes initiated by government. In this regard,

cultural factor account for 25%, socio-economic factor account for 65% and environmental factor account for 10% (Figure 3). This implies majority of respondents were of the view that, socio-economic factor is the prime factor hindering citizens to participate in public participation in Bida traditional city. The attributes of socio-economic factors are; education qualification, marginalization by the authorities, time and money, lack of access to information, among others^{23,24}. The finding is not supported by many previous studies^{3,4,25,26}. These scholars argued that, attributes of cultural factor are the fundamental barriers hindering public participation. They further elaborate that; attributes of cultural factors namely; ethnic differences, orientation, experience, and lack of structural tie with government are the principal factors impeding citizens to participate. Based on the above findings in this study, socio-economic factor is identified as the most significant factor hindering citizens to participate in Bida traditional city. In this regard, there is need for planning officers and law makers to critically examine this factor to have more understanding of impediments of public participation. This implies that, law makers will be able to design effective approach in facilitating involvement of citizens in public participation for urban development in traditional cities of developing countries like Bida in Nigeria.

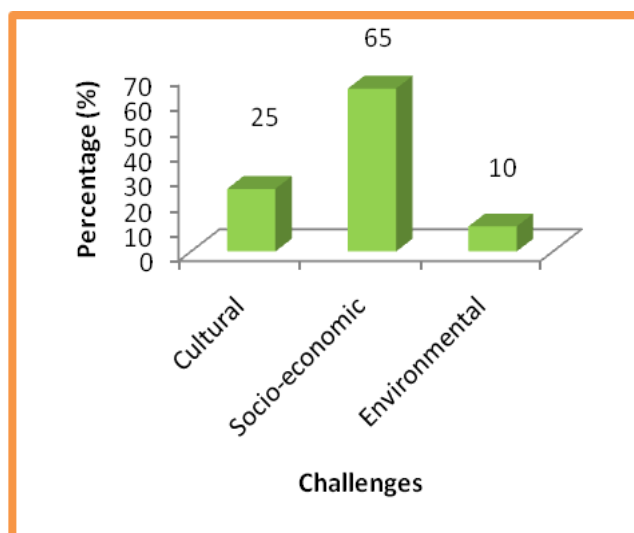


Figure 3. Individual-based factors affecting public Participation.

6. Conclusion

This study examines individual-based factors affecting citizens in public participation programme initiated by government in developing urban economy in the traditional city of Bida, Nigeria. In overall, the study reveals that, socio-economic factor is the fundamental challenge affecting public participation programme in Bida traditional city. Alarming from this study shows that, there is need for enlightening residents of traditional cities about the significance of the programme and their role to guarantee required and expected development in urban economy. This enlightenment could also alleviate the impact of socio-economic factors affecting the programme in developing countries, especially traditional cities. The findings could primarily help practitioners of the programme and law makers to gain more understanding of the challenges impeding the programme and how to make it more effective in developing urban economy in African countries, especially Nigeria.

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