Innovations

Effect of Community Relations Strategies on Community Development in Southwest Nigeria

[1]Oladipo, Taiwo Kolawole; [2]Ugwuonah, Geraldine Egondu;
[3]Kamalu Adamu Mohammed; [4]Kolawale Olasoji Abraham;
[5]Musa, Bulus Kwablang; [6]Olaifa, Jimoh Aremu

[1,2] Department of Marketing, [3,4] Department of Management,
[5,6] Department of Marketing

[1,2,3,4,5,6]Faculty of Business Administration, University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus

[3] ORCID: 0009-0006-5295-6339

Corresponding Author: **Oladipo, Taiwo Kolawole**

Abstract*: Community relations emphasize establishing and sustaining good relationships with members of the community. It focuses on finding better and productive ways of doing things in a manner that will improve the quality of life of the people. It is about the environment, social cohesion, meeting the various needs of the people in different communities, and creating equal opportunities that will bring about a strong and healthy society. The study sought to examine the influence of direct engagement of community members on infrastructure provision, determine the effect of sponsorships on access to education, and examine the effect of community day ceremonies on cultural preservation. To achieve the objectives of the study, a quantitative research design was used with 422 responses gathered. Findings from the study indicate that the various strategies, such as direct engagement of community members, sponsorships, and community day ceremonies, were pivotal to community development in the South West region of Nigeria. The study, therefore, recommends that the government should promote inclusivity and participation by ensuring that community members have a voice in decision-making processes for community development. Moreover, the government should invest in sponsorship and capacity-building programmes for community members to enhance access to quality education and empower them with skills for development efforts. Finally, community stakeholders and the government must encourage traditional ceremonies, such as community day ceremonies, to showcase the rich cultural heritage of the people.*

Keywords: *Direct engagement, infrastructural provision, sponsorship, access to education, community day ceremonies, cultural preservation*

1. **Introduction**

Community relations as practiced all over the world particularly in advanced economies is receiving much attention from government, organizations and institutions because of its importance to their survival and advancement. It has become so critical to organisations and government because its effect can be monumental to their survival. It plays a critical very role in the life and progress of each institution to the extent that if treated with kid glove, could lead to the down fall of the institution involved. Community relations according to Ahwen-Ishima (2006), refers to the various methods that companies use to establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with the communities in which they operate. It could also be seen as an institution's planned active and continuous participation with and within a community to maintain and enhance its environment to the benefit of both the institution and the community (Da Lattimore, Otis, Suzette, Heiman, Elizabeth, Jones, & Van, 2004). Onabajo (2005) viewed community relations from the perspective of cultivating and sustaining healthy relationships between an organization and the community where the organization exists. This was reinforced by Nwodu (2010) when he posited that corporate organisations should work closely with their host communities in order to sufficiently understand and contribute immensely to the concrete priority needs of such communities. Adefolakan (2006) argued that the concept evolved as a result of the interrelationship that exists between an organization and the community in which it exists.

Community relations is a critical component of public relations as it deals with the relationship between the organisation and the host community. As an important aspect of Public Relations, community relations efforts, if consciously and systematically implemented, will build reputational capital and brand loyalty for governments, organisations, and institutions while also ensuring the development of the communities.

The constant sophistication, complexity, and dynamism of the world have made the community relations' revolutionary role imperative to change the face of the earth. Globally, community relations have become very important in the development of communities and society. Different groups in the community and governments in Europe are engaged in meaningful interactions and offering an inclusive space for community engagement and empowerment. In France, there are community centres which serve as veritable hubs linking up with the people and providing essential services such as health care, empowerment initiatives, promoting food security and sustainability, and fostering community well-being. They also serve as a focal point for community engagement, social cohesion, and collective action, providing opportunities for community people to connect, collaborate, and participate in meaningful activities aimed at improving their quality of life.

In the US, Community Development Corporations (CDCs) exist to assist communities in any kind of improvement efforts. Many of them are associated with government agencies and offer a wide range of development services to the communities. They have a demographic focus rather than a location-specified base, meaning that a single CDC operates in multiple communities that are similar to one another in a particular aspect. Community relations are also fostered through various initiatives, such as town hall meetings, public forums, and social media engagement. Government agencies, like the Department of Health and Human Services, also collaborate with community organizations to promote public health programs and services.

In the UK, the government practises community relations through local authority engagement, community outreach programs, and public consultations. For instance, the UK's Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government works with local authorities to promote community cohesion and social integration.

In France, community relations are fostered through decentralized governance, where regional and local authorities engage with citizens through participatory budgeting and public consultations. The French government also promotes community development programs, such as the "Politique de la Ville," which aims to revitalize urban areas and promote social cohesion.

In Thailand, community relations are fostered through the government's "Pracharat" policy, which aims to promote community development and participatory governance. The government also engages with citizens through public forums and social media platforms.

In Africa and particularly in Nigeria, the need to achieve community development that will translate to national development through the deployment of pragmatic community relations efforts has become compelling. This has also made people more enlightened and aware of their fundamental human rights, which more often than not, has generated crises and face-offs among organizations and their host communities on the one hand and the government and the people on the other hand.

In line with this, Ahwen-Ishima (2006) described community relations as the various methods that companies use to establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with the communities in which they operate. Through community relations efforts, governments and organisations can develop the capacity to achieve their basic needs and objectives without losing sight of the aspirations and needs of the community. Thus, in this way, the organisation can commit a reasonable portion of its resources to those things that can bring positive changes in the community.

Adefolakan (2006) is of the view that the community deserves everything that the organisation can offer it because it owns the factory land and supplies human and

material resources needed by the organisation, while also guaranteeing peace and tranquility that make it conducive for the organisation to operate. On the other hand, the organisation must seek to be socially responsible by providing the basic needs of the community. The needs of the community are encapsulated in effective educational facilities, good health institutions, good roads as well as peace, law, order, and safety, which are the pillars of community development that can reduce poverty and elicit empowerment.

Community development, on the other hand, forms the kernel of the organisation's corporate social responsibility programmes, which are geared towards the development of the community and its institutions. It is guided by the principles of social contract, and must be seen to be socially responsible through the provision of infrastructural facilities, all of which translate substantially to national development. Amizire (2007) contended that community development all over the world implies the integration of the people's efforts with those of governments and organisations to improve the socio-economic and cultural lives of the people in the communities, thereby empowering them to contribute meaningfully to national development.

The importance of community relations strategies in ensuring community development in South West Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. Carrying out community relations strategic activities in the region would entail community development, where economic growth coexists harmoniously with socio- cultural preservation. However, as important as the role played by community relations tools in community and governance in general, it appears that many development communication practitioners or public relations officers in government seem not to have appreciated, let alone adopted fully, the utilization of community relations tools in their programmes and activities.

Community relations process is a continuous one and takes place through definite structures and strategies in the lifetime of an organisation, and all its elements towards community development depend on research, listening, and two-way communication. The attainment of good community relations activities requires the creation and adoption of new strategies, innovative skills and knowledge, including effective leadership which are made possible by corporate organisations, governments and entrepreneurs.

However, as lofty and noble as the programmes and initiatives of governments and corporate organisations are in ensuring community development, they are marred by policy inconsistency, prejudice, lack of consultation, high levels of corruption, and lack of a feedback mechanism for implemented policies (Bakare-Aremi and Osobase 2015). Ogbor, Ene-Nnajiofor, Agbaeze, Chukwu & Isijola (2017) agreed with this but stretched it further to include lack of entrepreneurial skills, political instability and poor socio-economic development.

Governments, organizations and institutions in Southwest, Nigeria try to establish and maintain mutual relationship with their host communities in order to garner patronage, goodwill and support. As effective as these community relations strategies are, governments have neglected them, preferring instead the modern media of communication. Moreover, greater number of studies have been carried out locally and internationally on community relations particularly in the area of sustainable development but few have dwelt specifically on community relations strategies in the direction of direct engagement of community members, sponsorships, community day ceremonies, partnership creation and age grade, and their effect on community development in Southwest Nigeria. Furthermore, the perspectives of many studies on community relations are narrowed on corporate organisations without attention on government practice of community relations.

In other words, many of the studies viewed community relations from the perspective of corporate organisations whereas it is also a good area for the government if properly executed, to boost its identity and reputation, eliminate hostility, ill-will, and violence, gain the support of the community and engender development on a sustainable level. Governments, too, particularly in Southwest Nigeria, have neglected community relations strategies in their development strides, but instead focus on the use of modern media of communication.

Indeed, realizing the strategic value of community relations would make its integration into development programmes easy, as this will enhance the capacities of the people to actively participate. Governments and development agencies neglect the intervention strategies of community relations, which are necessary to empower the communities and enhance their capacities and skills to engage in development programmes/projects or policy decision-making. The continued lack of meaningful development in most communities in the South West and Nigeria as a whole show that it is doubtful if participatory intervention or community relations strategies have generated a significant impact. Furthermore, most literature did not pay attention to the variables of community relations, which limit the general knowledge and understanding of its impact on community development. This study is therefore poised to bridge this gap by assessing the effect of community relations strategies on community development in Southwest Nigeria by investigating how direct engagement of community members, sponsorship, and community day ceremonies can be adopted for community development.

Specifically, the study is to:

i. Assess the influence of direct engagement of community members on infrastructure provision.

ii. Determine the effect of sponsorship on access to education.

iii. Evaluate the effect of community day ceremonies on cultural preservation.

2. Literature Review
2.1 The Concept of Community Relations

Community relations is a branch of public relations concerned with cultivating a healthy relationship between an organization and the community or communities where the organization exists (According to Nwodu 2010). Viewed critically, the community supplies much of the inputs needed by the organization in its operation such as land, human resources and raw materials in some cases and it behooves on the organization to reciprocate by beautifying the community through provision of development projects and programmes. This is what is conceptualized as social service responsibility of an organization.

Chukwu (2000) contended that community relations is a marketing strategy that engenders human connection between organisations and the community. It has a lot to do with the establishment and sustenance of programmes and actions that are environmentally friendly and mutually beneficial to both the organisation and the community. What it entails is that an organization should accept its role as a responsible corporate citizen and be involved actively in the improvement of the well-being of the members of the community where it operates. This in turn will elicit community support in terms of patronage, loyalty, goodwill, corporate visibility and other benefits.

Adefolakan (2006) maintained that community relations activities are deliberate efforts of organizations to improve social, economic, cultural, educational, and environmental status of the communities as a device to keep all segments of such communities on the side of the organization, come rain or shine. Stakeholders now hold companies accountable for the socio-economic impact they are making in every society where they operate. Deriving from this therefore, a company desirous of surviving will strengthen its ties with the community, explore better ways of contributing to the development of the community, shore up the visibility it receives from the community and seeks for ways of improving its relations and reputation among community members.

According to Onabajo (2005), there are five objectives of community relations, which include increase sales and patronage of organisation's product or services; exhibit commitment in the area of social responsibility of business - the contemporary prime objectives of business; make the community a better place for both the organization and the people of the community alike; maintain peace and harmony with the community; and prove a good corporate citizen.

Onabajo (2005) argued that community relations objectives can further be expressed in the following ways: to tell the community about the operations of the firm; to correct misunderstanding and remove any disaffection that may exist among

community neighbours; to gain the favourable opinion of the community particularly during strikes and labour unrest, by stating the company's position on the issues involved; to inform employees and their families about company's activities and development so that they can tell their friends and neighbours about the company and favourably influence opinion on the organization; to inform people in the local government about the firm's contributions to community welfare and to obtain support for legislation that will favourably affect the business climate of the community; to establish personal relationship between management and community leaders; to support health programmes through contributions of both funds and employee services to local campaigns; to aid youth and adult education by cooperating with administrators and teachers in providing students vocational guidance, teaching aids, finance and other support to schools; to encourage sports and recreational activities through the provision of sports infrastructure and equipment and by sponsoring sporting events; to operate a profitable business in order to provide jobs and to pay competitive wages that increase community purchasing power and strengthen its economy; and to cooperate with other local business in advancing economic and social welfare through joint community relations programmes financed and directed by the participating organisation.

2.2 Community Development.

Community development is a crucial aspect of overall development, centered on improving the well-being of people through collective efforts aligned with development goals. Oni (2015) defines it as a phase where community members plan and act collectively to meet their needs through deliberate programs that drive social change, emphasizing productive decision-making regarding resource use. Latopa and Saidu (2015) describe community development as an inclusive process involving all citizens to achieve positive community transformation, integrating efforts from people, government, and stakeholders to enhance socio-economic and cultural well-being (Amirize, 2007). Akande (2016) emphasizes that community development is rooted in people's right to influence decisions affecting them, promoting participation aimed at poverty eradication and social inclusion, with the United Nations charter of 1995 recognizing community development as a human right.

According to Todaro and Smith (2006), three core values guide community development: self-esteem, freedom from servitude, and sustainability, supported by principles like people-centeredness, participation, mobilisation, empowerment, sustainability, partnership, and social justice. Similarly, Arumah and Nzoagu (2018) define sustainable community development as the unification of community and external efforts to improve living conditions for the current generation without compromising future generations' ability to meet their needs.

2.3 Indicators of Community Relations

2.3.1 Direct Engagement of Community Members

The concept of government engagement with communities has evolved, shifting from minimal citizen input to a more participatory and empowerment-focused approach (Gaverita and Barret, 2012). Haghani, Sarvi, and Shaw (2013) define direct engagement as a proactive government strategy that involves working closely with communities to address issues, deliver services, gather input, and make decisions, emphasizing the importance of interactions across a range of policies, programs, and projects (National League of Cities, 2021).

Cornwall and Coelho (2007) highlight that direct engagement ensures communities have a voice in decisions affecting them, fostering inclusivity, while Bovaird (2007) notes that it enables policymakers to better understand and respond to community needs. Building long-term relationships through community engagement strengthens dialogue and inclusivity. Gaventa and Barrett (2012) argue that direct engagement can also prevent or mitigate conflicts by addressing concerns collaboratively. Additionally, Haghani, Sarvi, and Shaw (2013) point out that direct community engagement plays a crucial role in infrastructure development, ensuring projects align with community needs and enhancing sustainability.

2.3.2 Sponsorship

Sponsorship refers to the financial and resource support provided by government authorities to specific community projects, initiatives, organizations, or individuals (Pattillo, 2005). This support can take the form of grants, subsidies, funding, or in-kind assistance aimed at promoting community development, welfare, infrastructure improvement, or the achievement of common goals (United Nations Development Programme, 2008). Sponsorship carried out by the government in communities is significant as it enhances the capacity of communities to undertake development projects that may otherwise be beyond their financial means.

According to Ribot and Peluso (2003), sponsorship in communities promotes equity by ensuring that marginalized or disadvantaged communities receive resources and support to address their unique needs. From an economic lens, sponsorship can stimulate economic growth by supporting local businesses, job creation, and entrepreneurial activities within communities (O'Brien, Goetz, & Scholte, 2015). Adeyemo (2019) opined that government funding contributes to the improvement of essential infrastructure, such as roads, schools, healthcare facilities, and public services in communities. It makes for better funding of projects and lower risks as there are contingencies attached to government programmes and funding sources. In the event of failure or issues, communities using these resources will not be at a complete disadvantage. Government sponsorship in communities is a common

practice worldwide, where governments allocate budgets, establish grant programmes, or provide direct financial assistance to promote community well-being and development. This can include support for education, healthcare, housing, small businesses, cultural initiatives, and various other community-driven projects. By providing support to specific initiatives, the government can improve access to services, promote economic empowerment, increase social welfare, and achieve national development goals while also enhancing its credibility, improving governance, and reputation.

2.3.3 Community Day Ceremonies

The concept of government engagement with communities has shifted from minimal citizen involvement to a more participatory and empowerment-centered approach (Gaverita and Barret, 2012). Haghani, Sarvi, and Shaw (2013) describe direct engagement as a proactive strategy where governments collaborate closely with communities to address issues, provide services, and make decisions, highlighting the need for interaction across policies, programs, and projects (National League of Cities, 2021). Cornwall and Coelho (2007) emphasize that such engagement ensures communities have a voice, promoting inclusivity, while Bovaird (2007) notes it helps policymakers better understand and meet community needs. Building strong, lasting relationships through engagement fosters dialogue and inclusivity. Gaventa and Barrett (2012) add that direct engagement can prevent or mitigate conflicts by addressing concerns collaboratively. Furthermore, Haghani, Sarvi, and Shaw (2013) stress the role of direct engagement in aligning infrastructure projects with community needs to enhance sustainability.

2.4 Community Development Indicators

2.4.1 Infrastructural Provision

Infrastructure provision has a long history rooted in human civilization. Ancient societies constructed roads, aqueducts, and other infrastructure to support their communities. In modern times, the importance of infrastructure for economic growth and quality of life has become increasingly evident. Governments at various levels play a central role in infrastructure provision, often through partnerships with private sector entities and community engagement.

Infrastructure provision refers to the planning, construction, maintenance, and management of physical facilities and systems that support the functioning of a community or a region. This includes transportation networks, utilities (water, sewage, and electricity), public buildings, and other essential structures (Haghani, Sarvi, & Shaw, 2013).

According to the World Bank (2021), Infrastructural provision encompasses the delivery of essential public services, such as education, healthcare, and public

safety, which are vital for the well-being and development of a community. Infrastructure includes both visible components, like roads and buildings, and less visible elements, like utilities and communication networks. Infrastructural development is encapsulated in the framework of community development, and it encompasses all the efforts and activities towards the provision of basic infrastructure in society.

Ukata (2014) averred that developing infrastructure that is sustainable means improving the processes and mechanisms in building infrastructure in such a way that it meets the present needs of the people and reduces the impacts it would have in the future. It is the physical assets in the realm of fundamental facilities, such as schools, health institutions, roads, power, among others which are the drivers of the economy.

The significance of infrastructural provisions in communities cannot be overemphasized. Adequate infrastructure facilitates economic growth by reducing transportation costs, enhancing productivity, and attracting businesses (Aschauer, 2009). In their report, OECD (2006) contended that infrastructural provision directly impacts the quality of life for residents by ensuring access to essential services, safe transportation, and improved living conditions. Additionally, AECOM (2017) posited that well-designed infrastructure enhances a community's resilience to natural disasters and emergencies by providing robust systems for response and recovery.

2.4.2 Access to Education

Access to education emphasizes providing equal opportunities for all individuals, including those with disabilities, and preventing exclusion from the educational system (UNESCO, 2004). The World Bank (2005) defines it as the affordability of education across socio-economic groups, while Heyneman and Loxley (2013) stress the importance of the physical proximity of schools to communities, especially in rural areas. Access to education is vital for enhancing individuals' skills and employability, driving community economic growth (Barro & Lee, 2001), and breaking cycles of poverty by offering better job opportunities (Psacharopoulos, 2014).

UNESCO (2020) highlights that education fosters social inclusion and reduces demographic disparities, while Glewwe, Kremer, and Moulin (2004) assert that educated individuals are more likely to engage in and contribute to community development. Government sponsorship plays a crucial role in promoting access to education by funding tuition subsidies, scholarships, and infrastructure improvements (World Bank, 2005), enforcing inclusive policies (UNESCO, 2004),

and reducing geographical barriers through the construction and maintenance of educational facilities (Heyneman & Loxley, 2013).

2.4.3 Cultural Preservation

Cultural preservation, rooted in historical and anthropological efforts, emerged to safeguard cultural heritage against modernization, globalization, and environmental threats. According to the Smithsonian Institution (2003), it involves deliberate efforts to protect and promote traditions, artifacts, languages, and customs for future generations, while ICOMOS (2008) emphasizes preserving both tangible and intangible cultural assets with authenticity and sustainability.

UNESCO (2003) highlights the protection of traditions and skills that foster cultural diversity, and Berkes (2009) stresses the importance of preserving indigenous knowledge systems vital to community identity and sustainability. Cultural preservation strengthens community identity, ensures the transmission of cultural practices (UNESCO, 2003; Smithsonian Institution, 2003), promotes diversity and tolerance (ICOMOS, 2008), and builds community resilience (Berkes, 2009). It also supports development by encouraging local participation, volunteerism, and community action. Literature identifies three types of cultural preservation: tangible (e.g., buildings, artifacts), intangible (e.g., oral traditions, rituals), and natural/environmental preservation (e.g., sacred landscapes and ecological practices) (Berkes, 2009).

2.5 Theoretical Framework.
2.5.1 Relationship Management Theory

The Relationship Management Theory emphasizes the effective establishment and analytical management of mutual relationships between organizations and their publics, applying public relations techniques to foster these connections. First introduced by Mary Ann Ferguson in 1984 and expanded by Ledingham and Bruning in 1998, the theory views relationship management as goal-oriented, transactional, and dynamic, reliant on communication and supportive behavior to meet expectations and achieve mutual benefit. According to Bridges and Nelson (2000), strong relationships, rooted in shared interests and goals, are essential for organizational and public success, with communication playing a central strategic role. While partnership and common interests are vital for durable relationships, Kim (2001) argues that good faith must prevail, even if benefits are unequal, to prevent relationship failure.

The theory also highlights stakeholder engagement as crucial to public relations, involving individuals or groups with shared interests who impact and are impacted

by organizational activities. Relationship management hinges on mutuality, commitment, trust, satisfaction, and communal bonds, which governments and practitioners must foster to support effective community development efforts.

2.5.2 Participatory Theory

Participatory theory emphasizes the involvement of stakeholders throughout the development process, from conceptualization to post-implementation, utilizing the community's physical, social, and economic resources to achieve development goals. Quick and Martha (2011) describe it as a process allowing affected groups to meaningfully influence decision outcomes. Centered on a bottom-up approach, participatory theory empowers people to manage their development, encouraging initiatives through imaginative thinking and community-driven decision-making. Roodt (2001) highlights the involvement of Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), women, youths, and age groups, focusing on empowerment, capacity building, self-reliance, and sustainability.

However, governments and organizations often overlook strategies that enhance community participation, missing out on benefits like project ownership, as Waisbord (2001) noted. Okunna (2012) supports this, stressing that people's participation fosters dialogue and shared decision-making, while Metalopulous (2008) underscores that stakeholder participation is central to project sustainability. The participatory approach also leverages communication tools mass media, traditional media, social media, and interpersonal communication, to mobilize communities in identifying needs and executing development initiatives.

2.6 Empirical Review

Anatsui (2011), in his study "Community Relations as the Bedrock for Rural Development in Nigeria," emphasized that community relations strategies are essential for achieving organizational objectives, particularly in corporate social responsibility and enhancing rural life quality through corporate citizenship, based on qualitative analysis using purposive sampling and structured interviews.

Adedokun, Adeyemo, and Olorunsola (2010) examined "The Impact of Communication on Community Development" and found that effective communication fosters active community participation and ownership of development initiatives, using descriptive survey methods in Akinyele Local Council of Oyo State.

Rathenam and Dabup (2017) in their study on the Hammanskraal Pedestrian Bridge project discovered that community engagement significantly impacts infrastructural

provision, highlighting the importance of involving local communities in public sector construction projects.

Similarly, Imran, Ross, and Luxmoore (2014) explored community participation in infrastructure delivery in Australia and India, revealing that community involvement facilitates faster and more adequate infrastructure provision and supports local capacity building.

Tade (2020), in his study on "Impact of Government Investment in Education and Entrepreneurship," found that government investment significantly influences educational access and entrepreneurship development in Nigeria, affecting the country's Global Innovation Index ranking.

In a related study, Maksymenko and Tranfaglia (2015) showed that professional athlete sponsorship positively affects pupils' educational attainment in Western Kenya, with strong correlations across most subjects except Kiswahili.

Prudencio (2023) analyzed the impact of international child sponsorship on higher education aspirations in Mexico, finding a positive relationship between sponsorship and the likelihood of pursuing higher education through a binary Roy-type model.

Harrison, Phiri, Mwaka, and Nachimwenda (2021) in their study "Value of Traditional Ceremonies in Socio-Economic Development," found that traditional ceremonies not only support socio-economic growth but also play a crucial role in preserving cultural heritage in Zambia.

Supriharjoa, Rahmawatia, and Santosoa (2016), studying heritage sustainability in Kampung Kemasan, Gresik, identified a strong sense of belonging among community members as a major factor sustaining community-based heritage, using root-cause analysis and fishbone visualization.

Lastly, Adekola and Nwoye (2016), in their research on "Traditions and Customs in Community Development" in Nkanu West and East LGAs of Enugu State, revealed that traditions and customs significantly influence community development both positively and negatively.

3.0 Methodology

The study employed a descriptive survey design and was conducted in five South-Western Nigerian states: Ekiti, Oyo, Osun, Ogun, and Ondo. Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire based on a 5-point Likert scale. The study population consisted of 1,646 participants, including 1,480 management and staff of

relevant government agencies and 166 community stakeholders. A sample size of 422 (306 management/staff and 116 community stakeholders) was determined using Stat Trek's Sample Size Planning Wizard (Trek, 2004), and purposive sampling was applied. Questionnaires were administered directly to respondents, and content validity was ensured through expert review. Reliability, assessed with Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient, yielded a value of 0.74, indicating strong reliability.

4.0 Data Analysis and Results
The data collected through the questionnaire were analyzed in two stages. First, descriptive statistics, including simple percentages, tables, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize the data and provide an initial overview of the results.

Subsequently, linear regression analysis was conducted using SPSS software to test the three hypotheses guiding the study, examining the relationships between the variables.

Analyses of the Research Questions
Table 1: Examine the influence of direct engagement of community members on infrastructure provision.

		N	Minimum	Maximum	STD Deviation	Mean
1	Direct engagement of community members directly impacts the quality of infrastructure in the area.	422	1	5	0.89	4.14
2	Direct involvement of community stakeholders is crucial for effective infrastructure development.	422	1	5	1.50	3.56
3	Involvement of community stakeholders ensures timely delivery of infrastructure projects.	422	1	5	0.91	4.46
4	Direct community involvement ensures the infrastructure needs of the community are met.	422	1	5	1.36	3.67
	Valid N (Listwise)	**422**				**3.957**

Source: Researcher Field Survey, 2024

In the table above, the descriptive analysis consisting of the mean and standard deviation, of direct engagement of community members items yielded a mean score of 3.957, surpassing the midpoint of 3 on the Likert scale (5-Strongly Agree (SA), 4-Agree (A), 3-Undecided (U), 2-Disagree (D), 1-Strongly Disagree, SD). The results are presented in the table above which indicated positive response, suggesting a trend towards agreement.

Table 2: Determine the effect of sponsorship on access to education.

		N	Minimum	Maximum	STD Deviation	Mean
1.	Government sponsorship initiatives contribute to improving educational opportunities for underprivileged students.	422	1	5	0.95	4.35
2.	Government sponsorship programmes contribute to reducing educational inequality and promoting inclusivity among different segments in communities.	422	1	5	0.80	4.22
3.	Sponsorship programmes address financial barriers that hinder students from pursuing education.	422	1	5	1.00	4.29
4.	Sponsorships positively impact the enrollment and attendance rates of students who might have otherwise faced challenges accessing education.	422	1	5	1.00	4.31
	Valid N (Listwise)	**422**				**4.292**

Source: Researcher Field Survey, 2024

The table above shows the descriptive statistics for sponsorship items which revealed a mean score of 4.292, indicating a positive response. The mean score exceeds the neutral thresh hold of 3, which represents the average of the Likert scale (5-Strongly Agree (SA), 4-Agree (A), 3-Undecided (U), 2-Disagree (D), 1-Strongly Disagree, SD). This suggests a strong inclination towards agreement among respondents.

Table 3: Examine the effect of community day ceremonies on cultural preservation.

		N	Minimum	Maximum	STD Deviation	Mean
1.	Community day ceremonies contribute to the documentation and preservation of traditional art forms, music, and other cultural expressions.	422	1	5	1.26	4.01
2.	Community day ceremonies contribute to raising awareness and understanding of cultural traditions among the younger population.	422	1	5	0.89	4.47
3.	Community day ceremonies foster a sense of pride and identity in the cultural heritage among community members.	422	1	5	0.77	4.46
4.	Community day ceremonies lead to increased participation and engagement in activities related to our cultural heritage within the community.	422	1	5	0.87	4.54
	Valid N (Listwise)	**422**				**4.37**

Source: Researcher Field Survey, 2024

3. The table above indicates that the descriptive analysis of community day ceremony items produced a mean score of 4.37, demonstrating a favorable response. This score surpasses the midpoint of 3 on the Likert scale (5-Strongly Agree (SA), 4-Agree (A), 3-Undecided (U), 2-Disagree (D), 1-Strongly Disagree (SD), which indicates a strong agreement among respondents.

Test of Hypotheses
4.2.1 Hypothesis One
H$_0$: Direct engagement of community members does not significantly influence infrastructural provision in Southwest, Nigeria
H$_1$: Direct engagement of community members significantly influences infrastructure provision in Southwest, Nigeria

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.516a	.266	.264	.35941

a. Predictors: (Constant), Direct engagement of community members

Anova

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	16.684	1	16.684	129.333	.000b
	Residual	45.986	398	.129		
	Total	62.670	399			

a. Dependent Variable: Infrastructural provisions
b. Predictors: (Constant), Direct engagement of community members
Source: Researcher's Field Work (2024)

Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1. (Constant)	2.506	.156		16.064	.000
Direct Engagement	.423	.037	.516	11.432	.000

Dependent Variable: Infrastructural Provisions
Source: Researcher's Field Work (2024)

The Model Summary reveals a substantial relationship between direct engagement of community members and infrastructural provision, with 51.6% of the variation in infrastructural provision attributed to community engagement. The ANOVA results (F = 129.333, P < 0.05) led to the rejection of the null hypothesis, confirming that community engagement significantly influences infrastructural provision in Southwest, Nigeria. Furthermore, the coefficient table shows a positive significant effect of community engagement on infrastructural provision (B = 0.516, t = 11.432, P < 0.05).

4.2.2 Hypothesis Two

H_0: Sponsorship does not have significant effect on access to education in Southwest, Nigeria

H_1: Sponsorship has significant effect on access to education in Southwest, Nigeria.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.665[a]	.429	.312	.39569
a. Predictors: (Constant), Sponsorship				

Source: Researcher's Field Work (2024)

Anova[a]						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	15.385	1	15.385	97.993	.000[b]
	Residual	55.740	398	.157		
	Total	71.126	399			
a. Dependent Variable: access to education						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Sponsorship						

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.087	.146		21.143	.000
	Sponsorship	.319	.032	.665	9.968	.000
a. Dependent Variable: access to education						

Source: Researcher's Field Work (2024)

The Model Summary indicates a strong positive correlation between sponsorship and access to education (R = 0.665, R2 = 0.429), with 42.9% of the variation in access to education explained by sponsorship. The ANOVA results (F = 97.993, P < 0.05) demonstrate that sponsorship has a significant effect on access to education in Southwest, Nigeria. The coefficient table confirms this finding, showing a positive significant effect of sponsorship on access to education (B = 0.665, t = 9.968, P < 0.05).

4.2.3 Hypothesis Three

H_0: Community day ceremonies do not have significant effect on cultural preservation in Southwest, Nigeria

H_0: Community day ceremonies have significant effect on cultural preservation in Southwest, Nigeria

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.658[a]	.432	.208	.38048
a. Predictors: (Constant), Community day ceremonies				

Source: Researcher's Field Work (2024)

Anova[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	13.711	1	13.711	94.558	.000[b]
	Residual	51.537	398	.145		
	Total	65.248	399			

a. Dependent Variable: Cultural preservation
b. Predictors: (Constant), Community day ceremonies
Source: Researcher's Field Work (2024)

Coefficients[a]						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.227	.205		10.863	.000
	Communityday ceremonies	.439	.045	.658	9.755	.000
a. Dependent Variable: cultural preservation						

Source: Researcher's Field Work (2024)

The Model Summary shows that Community Day Ceremonies have a profound impact on cultural preservation, accounting for 65.8% of the variation. The null hypothesis, stating that Community Day Ceremonies have no significant effect on cultural preservation in Southwest, Nigeria was rejected based on the ANOVA results (F = 94.559, P < 0.05). The coefficient table further supports this finding, indicating a significant positive effect of Community Day Ceremonies on cultural preservation (B = 0.658, t = 9.755, P < 0.05).

Discussions of Findings
Hypothesis one revealed that direct engagement has a statistical significant influence on infrastructure provision as P value = 0.000 < 0.05 and the R-square value of 0.278 suggest that approximately 27.8% of the variance in infrastructure provision can be explained by direct engagement of community members. We therefore reject the null hypothesis which states that direct engagement of community members does not significantly influence infrastructural provision. Direct engagement significantly influences infrastructural provision in Southwest, Nigeria. This is in agreement with the findings of Rathenam and Dabup (2017) who conducted a study on the "impact of community engagement on public construction project: case study of Harmmanskraal Pedestrian Bridge, City of Tshwane, South Africa", findings revealed that community engagement significantly affect the infrastructural provision in community.

Hypothesis two showed that sponsorship has a statistical significant effect on access to education as P value = 0.00 < 0.05 and the R-square value of 0.316 suggest that approximately 31.6% of the variance in access to education can be explained by

sponsorship. The null hypothesis that states that sponsorship does not have significant effect on access to education in Southwest,Nigeria is therefore rejected while the alternate hypothesis is acceptedThis result was in line with that of Prudencio (2023) that carried out a study on "International Child Sponsorship Impact on the Intended Choice of Acquiring a Higher Education Degree in Mexico". It investigated the impact of child sponsorship program on the aspiration to acquire a higher education degree among a group of rural children in Mexico. The findings indicated a positive relationship between the sponsorship effect and the selection into the programme.

Hypothesis three revealed that community day ceremonies contribute significantly and have effect on cultural preservation in the South West States of Nigeria as p-value = 0.00 < 0.05 and the R-square value of 0.310 suggest that approximately 31.0% of the variance in cultural preservation can be explained by community day ceremonies. This result was in line with the study of Harrison, Phiri, Mwaka, and Nachimwenda (2021) who carried out a study on "the value of traditional ceremonies in socio-economic development: A Case of some selected traditional ceremonies in Zambia". Findings revealed that traditional ceremonies serve as platforms used in preserving the cultural heritages of communities.

Summary of Findings

The findings at the end of the study include the following

i. Direct engagement of community members has significant influenceon infrastructural provision in the South West States of Nigeria. With P-value =0.000< 0.05 and R2 value of 0.278 which is approximately 27.8%, the variance in infrastructural provision can be explained by direct engagement. This implies that directly engaging with the community members would significantly enhance government performance in term of carrying out their primary objective of providing infrastructural facilities in the communities.

ii. Sponsorship has significant effect on access to education in the South West States of Nigeria. With P-value = 0.000 < 0.05 and R^2 value of 0.316 which is approximately 31.6%, the variance in access to education can be explained by sponsorship. This indicates that government sponsorships when promoted and implemented are capable of reducing the level of illiteracy and ensuring many people have access to quality education.

iii. Community day ceremonies significantly have effect on the cultural preservation in the South West States of Nigeria. The result stood at P-value = 0.000 < 0.05 and R^2 value of 0.310 which is approximately 31.0% of the variance in cultural preservation which can be explained by community day ceremonies. This means that intentional organization and celebration

of community day ceremonies are capable of instilling and passing the cultural values of the community from one generation to another, thereby preserving their cultural heritage.

5.2   Conclusion

Community relations strategies are significant in ensuring community development in any nation. It is not simply an afterthought when it comes to the development of communities, societies, and nations. Public relations consultants, especially community relations experts invest sufficient time in developing adequate strategies geared towards improving the viability, growth, and development of communities. The rewards for doing so are enhanced educational access, infrastructural provision, social cohesion and security, cultural preservation, entrepreneurship development, among others.

Understanding the role of community relations is very critical in ensuring and maximizing success in any government especially in terms of carrying out their primary objectives in communities. Hence, it is necessary to understand its components, impact and principles, thus anticipating and planning how the people will react to policies and reforms.

Ultimately, the success of community development in Southwest Nigeria hinges on the commitment of all stakeholders (government and community leaders) to work together, learn from experiences, and adapt strategies to the evolving needs of communities. By continuously assessing and improving community relations strategies, Southwest Nigeria and indeed other parts of the country can move toward a future of greater resilience, prosperity, and well-being for all its residents.

5.3   Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1.   Government should promote inclusivity and participation by ensuring that community members, have a voice in decision-making processes, thus, encouraging active participation in community development initiatives so as to build a sense of ownership and shared responsibility.
2.   Government should invest in capacity-building programs for community members, as this will empower them with the knowledge and skills needed to lead and sustain development efforts effectively.
3.   Community stakeholders and government must encourage activities and initiatives like community day ceremonies and other traditional ceremonies that showcase their rich cultural heritages so as to preserve their culture and pass it on to the next generation.

References:

1. Adedokun, M.O., Adeyemo, C.W. & Olorunsola, E.O. (2010): *The Impact of Communication on Community Development. Journal of Communication 1(2): 101-105 (2010).*

2. Adefolakan, J. (2006): *"At Peace with the Community: A Perspective on Community Relations" in Raufu, G. (2006)(Eds) Public Relations Practice: Planning, Strategic & Media, Meek Associates Publishers, Lagos.*

3. Adekola, G. & Nwoye, C. E. (2016). *Traditions and customs in community development: The case of Nkanu West and Nkanu East Local Government Areas of Enugu State, Nigeria. Journal of Education and Practice, 7(18), 120-127.*

4. Adeyemo, D. (2019). *Impact of Government Sponsorship on Rural Community Development: A Case Study of Nigeria. International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Research, 5(6), 41-48.*

5. AECOM. (2017). *Disaster Resilience: A National Imperative. www. aecom.com.*

6. Ahwen-Ishima, P. (2006): *Good Corporate Image, Effective Manager-Daily Independent Newspapers. April 20, 2015.*

7. Akande, J. O. (2016) *Understanding Community Development: A Handbook for Educators and Practitioners, Ile-Ife: Obafemi Awolowo University Press.*

8. Amizire, B. (2007): *Community Education in Contemporary Nigeria. Port Harcourt FIO Press.*

9. Anaeto, S. G. & Solo-Anaeto, M. (2018): *Development Communication: Principles and Practice. Ibadan: Stirling-Horden Ltd.*

10. Anatsui, T. C. (2011): *Community Relations as Bedrock for Rural Development in Nigeria. Journal of Arts and Culture, Vol.6 No.1, ISSN: 2006-1145.*

11. Aruma, E. O. & Uzoagu, F. I. (2018) *Values of Sustainable Community Development, International Journal of Education, Learning and Development Vol. 6. No.1 pp.26-35 ISSN 2054-6300.*

12. Barro, R. J., & Lee, J. W. (2001). *International Data on Educational Attainment: Updates and Implications. Oxford Economic Papers, 53(3), 541-563.*

13. Berkes, F. (2009). *Sacred ecology: Traditional ecological knowledge and resource management. Taylor & Francis.*

14. Bovaird, T. (2007). *Beyond engagement and participation: user and community coproduction of public services. Public Administration Review, 67(5), 846-860.*

15. Bridges, J. A., & Nelson, R. A. (2000): *Issues Management: A Relational Approach in Ledingham, J.A & Brunig S.D (Eds) Public Relations as Relationship Management. A Relational Approach to Public Relations pp. 95-115 Mahwah N. J. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.*

16. Chukwu, I. (2000): *Public Relations: Its Role in Marketing. Enugu, Melfin Publishing, Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (As Amended) Abuja Federal Government Press.*

17. Cornwall, A., & Coelho, V. S. (2007). Spaces for change? The politics of participation in New democratic arenas. Zed Books.

18. Da Lattimore, Otis Baskin, Suzette, T. Heiman, Elizabeth, I. Toth, Jones K. and Van Leuren, (2004): Public Relations: The Profession and the Practice. McGraw Hill Co. Inc. New York 10020.

19. Gaventa, J., & Barrett, G. (2012). So What Difference Does It Make? Mapping the Outcomes of Citizen Engagement. World Development, 40(12), 2379-2393.

20. Glewwe, P., Kremer, M., & Moulin, S. (2004). Many Children Left Behind? Textbooks and Test Scores in Kenya. American Economic Review, 94(2), 414-420.

21. Haghani, A., Sarvi, M., & Shaw, S. (2013).Macroscopic Analysis of Infrastructure Provision in Disaster Evacuation Management. Transportation Research Record, 2382(1), 1-9.

22. Harrison, D., Phiri, D., Mwaka, C.F. & Nachimwenda, E. (2021). Value of traditional ceremonies in socio-economic development. A case of some selected traditional ceremonies in Zambia.International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education (IJHSSE), 8(2), 134-141

23. Heyneman, S. P., & Loxley, W. A. (2013). The Effect of Primary-School Quality on Academic Achievement across Twenty-Nine High- and Low-Income Countries. American Journal of Sociology, 88(6), 1162-1194.

24. ICOMOS. (2008). The Valletta Principles for the Safeguarding and Management of Historic Cities, Towns, and Urban Areas. International Council on Monuments and Sites.

25. Imran, M., Ross, J. & Luxmoore, I. (2014). Community participation in the delivery of infrastructure: A cross-cultural examination of its impact on the capacity building of local communities. The Proceedings of the Australia and New Zealand Association of Planning Schools 2014 Conference, Massey University, New Zealand.

26. Kim Y., (2001): Searching for Organisation Public Relationship: A Valid and Reliable Instrument. Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly. 78(4) 799-815.

27. Leningham, J. A. & Buanig, S. D. (2001): Community Relations in Health, R.L (Ed) Handbook on Public Relations pp.527-534. Thousand Oaks C.A-Sage.

28. Maksymenko, S. & Tranfaglia, A. (2015). The impact of professional athlete sponsorship on educational attainment in WesternKenya.International Journal of Educational Development, 41(1), 97-103.

29. National League of Cities. (2021). Community Engagement Toolkit. www.nlc.org.

30. Nwodu, L. C. (2010): "Community Relations as a Critical Factor in Managing Niger Delta Crisis" in: Nwosu, I. E. & Wilson, D. (Eds) Communication, Media and Conflict Management in Nigeria, Enugu: ACCE/Prime Target.

31. O'Brien, R., Goetz, A. M., & Scholte, S. (2015).Contesting Global Governance: Multilateral Economic Institutions and Global Social Movements. Cambridge University Press

32. OECD. (2006). Infrastructure to 2030: Telecom, Land Transport, Water and Electricity. OECD Publishing.

33. Okunna, C. S. (2012): Introduction to Mass Communication, Enugu: New Generation Books.

34. Onabajo, O. (2005): Community Relations in Action, Concepts Publication Ltd.

35. Oni, J.(2015): Community Participation in Rural Development: Catalyst for Sustainable Development www.ocernit.org.

36. Pattillo, C. (2005). Can Africa Industrialize? UNU-WIDER.

37. Prudencio, D. (2023). International Child Sponsorship Impact on the Intended Choice of Acquiring a Higher Education Degree: The case of Rural Mexico

38. Psacharopoulos, G. (2014). Returns to Investment in Education: A Global Update. World Development, 22(9), 1325-1343.

39. Putnam, R. D. (2000). Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community. Simon & Schuster.

40. Rathenam, B.D.C. & Dabup, N. L. (2017). Impact of community engagement on public construction projects: Case study of Hammanskraal Pedestrian Bridge, City of Tshwane, South Africa. Universal Journal of Management, 5(9), 418-428.

41. Ribot, J. C., & Peluso, N. L. (2003). A Theory of Access. Rural Sociology, 68(2), 153-181.

42. Smith, A. D. (2005). Nations and Nationalism in a Global Era. Polity Press.

43. Smithsonian Institution. (2003). Principles of Cultural Heritage Conservation. Smithsonian Center for Materials Research and Education.

44. Supriharjoa, R. D., Rahmawatia, D. & Santosoa, E. B. (2016). Factors influencing community-based heritage sustainability in Kampung Kemasan, Gresik. Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 227(1), 498 – 502.

45. Tade, O.D. (2020). Impact of government investment in education and entrepreneurship .Sapientia Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Development Studies (SGOJAHDS), 3(4) 229 – 239.

46. Todaro, M. P. & Smith, P. C. (2006): Economic Development 8th Edition London: Addison-Wesley Longman.

47. Trek, J. (2004): Statistics for Beginners, USA South Western Centage Learning.

48. Ukata, C.B.(2014): Non- governmental organizations and Community Development in Rural Buanchor of Cross River State of Nigeria, International Journal of Innovative Environment Studies Research 2(1): 1-7

49. UNESCO. (2003). *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.*

50. UNESCO. (2004). *The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.*

51. UNESCO. (2020). *Inclusion and Education: All Means All. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.*

52. United Nations Development Programme. (2008). *Guidelines for UNDP support to Conflict Prevention and Peace building. www.undp.org.*

53. World Bank. (2005). *World Development Report 2006: Equity and Development. The World Bank.*

54. World Bank. (2021). *Infrastructure for Development: Overview. www.worldbank.org.*