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COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION, CULTURAL PRESERVATION, THE ROLE OF TRADITIONAL RULERS IN RELATION TO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN CALABAR MUNICIPALITY, CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined the associations between community participation, cultural preservation, the role of traditional rulers and perceived community development in Calabar Municipality, Cross River State, Nigeria. A cross-sectional correlational design and multistage sampling procedure were adopted. Of the 640 copies of the questionnaire administered, 612 were recovered and included in the analysis, representing a response rate of 95.6%. Data were analysed using frequencies, percentages, chi-square tests of independence, Cramer's V and binary logistic regression. Community participation was significantly associated with perceived community development, $\chi^2(2) = 108.33$, $p < .001$, $V = .421$. Cultural preservation was also significantly associated with perceived community development, $\chi^2(2) = 99.05$, $p < .001$, $V = .402$. Similarly, the reported role of traditional rulers was significantly associated with perceived community development, $\chi^2(2) = 100.77$, $p < .001$, $V = .406$. In the adjusted logistic regression model, moderate and high levels of community participation and cultural preservation, as well as a high reported role of traditional rulers, were associated with greater odds of respondents reporting high perceived community development. The findings indicate that the three factors were associated with perceived community development, although the cross-sectional design does not establish causal relationships. The study recommends strengthening resident participation in community affairs, supporting the transmission of cultural values and practices, and encouraging the constructive involvement of traditional rulers in local development activities.

***Keywords**:* Community participation, cultural preservation, traditional rulers, perceived community development, Calabar Municipality.

Introduction

Education is central to the development of individuals and communities. Beyond formal schooling, indigenous and traditional education has historically transmitted knowledge, values, skills, beliefs and practices from one generation to another. Such learning takes place through observation, storytelling, apprenticeship, communal activities and interaction with elders and other members of the community. It therefore connects education with the social and cultural life of the people and prepares individuals to participate in activities that sustain the community (Boadu et al., 2021; Viscogliosi et al., 2020). Participation in community development is concerned with citizens' involvement in community betterment activities (Chukwuemerie & Nzeneri, 2015). Community development depends partly on the capacity of community members to identify common needs and participate in addressing them. Community participation enables residents to contribute to decision making, planning, implementation, monitoring and resource mobilisation. Empirical evidence indicates that meaningful participation is associated with greater ownership, accountability and sustainability of community development projects (Abiona & Bello, 2013; Haldane et al., 2019). Evidence from Nigeria further indicates that participation in decision making and project monitoring is more strongly related to sustainable development outcomes than participation limited to labour or financial contributions (Akindoyeni et al., 2025). However, participation may have limited effects when it is merely consultative, controlled by local elites or constrained by inadequate information and capacity (Boadu et al., 2021; Kamanga & Masaiti, 2026).

Cultural preservation is another important element of community development. Indigenous languages, oral traditions, festivals, crafts, beliefs, values and other forms of cultural knowledge connect members of a community with their history and identity. Their transmission through indigenous and traditional education can strengthen cultural continuity and social relationships. Evidence from Nigeria and other African settings indicates that indigenous languages, storytelling, traditional practices and community-based learning contribute to cultural identity and intergenerational knowledge transmission (Adedigba et al., 2023; Mudau, 2024; Onyebuchi-Igbokwe & Amanze, 2025). Cultural preservation can also support local development where cultural knowledge and practices are incorporated into community activities, livelihoods and heritage management (Boadu et al., 2021; Chukwurah et al., 2025). However, the benefits may be reduced where cultural preservation is externally controlled, poorly supported or disconnected from everyday community life (Brooks et al., 2023).

Traditional rulers constitute another important institution within indigenous community life. They have historically served as custodians of culture, transmitters of customary knowledge, mediators and mobilisers of community members. Their position may enable them to communicate development initiatives, mobilise residents, settle disputes and encourage participation in

community activities (Ihemeje et al., 2016; Omitola et al., 2021). Evidence from Cross River State is particularly relevant. Isokon et al. (2017), in a survey of 520 traditional rulers, found that inadequate incentives and resource allocation significantly reduced their capacity for grassroots mobilisation for rural development. Other Nigerian studies have similarly linked traditional rulers with community development, policy implementation, peace building and local mobilisation (Ashade & Osawe, 2025). These findings suggest that the contribution of traditional rulers may depend not only on their cultural legitimacy but also on the authority and resources available to them.

The studies reviewed address community participation, cultural preservation and traditional rulers in different settings and often examine these factors separately. Evidence combining the three factors in one empirical model of perceived community development among adult residents of Calabar Municipality is limited in the literature reviewed for this study. The present study addresses this local empirical gap by examining the bivariate associations of each factor with perceived community development and their adjusted associations when entered simultaneously in a logistic regression model. Indigenous and traditional learning is relevant as a conceptual setting in which cultural knowledge and communal responsibilities may be transmitted; however, it was not measured as a separate construct in the questionnaire. The empirical claims in this article are therefore restricted to the four measured constructs.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study was to examine the associations between community participation, cultural preservation, the role of traditional rulers and perceived community development in Calabar Municipality, Cross River State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. determine the relationship between community participation and perceived community development in Calabar Municipality;
2. examine the relationship between cultural preservation and perceived community development in Calabar Municipality; and
3. determine the relationship between the role of traditional rulers and perceived community development in Calabar Municipality.

1.2 Statement of Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at the .05 level of significance:

$H_0$1: There is no significant relationship between community participation and perceived community development in Calabar Municipality.

H_o2: There is no significant relationship between cultural preservation and perceived community development in Calabar Municipality.

H_o3: There is no significant relationship between the reported role of traditional rulers and perceived community development in Calabar Municipality.

2. Methods

2.1 Design and Population

A cross-sectional correlational research design was adopted to examine the relationships among community participation, cultural preservation, the role of traditional rulers and perceived community development in Calabar Municipality, Cross River State, Nigeria. The design was appropriate because the study examined associations among the variables as they occurred naturally, without manipulating respondents' experiences or community conditions.

The target population comprised adult residents aged 18 years and above in Calabar Municipality, Cross River State, Nigeria. For sampling purposes, the study adopted a projected adult population estimate of 186,400, reportedly derived from National Bureau of Statistics population projections. However, the estimate of 92,750 eligible residents could not be independently derived from the information available. Eligibility was defined as being aged 18 years or above, ordinarily resident in Calabar Municipality, and willing to participate after being informed about the study. Both population figures were treated as planning estimates rather than counts from a contemporaneous census. As population figures for individual wards and communities were unavailable, the researchers used a multistage sampling procedure involving the selection of wards, communities, households and individual respondents.

2.2 Sampling

A multistage sampling procedure was used. At the first stage, six wards were selected by balloting from the 10 administrative wards in the municipality. At the second stage, four communities were selected from each sampled ward, giving 24 communities; their names are withheld to preserve confidentiality. At the third stage, households were selected systematically within the sampled communities, with allocation based on the estimated number of eligible households in each community (National Bureau of Statistics, 2026). At the final stage, where a selected household contained more than one eligible adult, one respondent was selected by balloting. This gave eligible adults within the same household an opportunity to be selected and prevented fieldworkers from choosing respondents on the basis of convenience.

The initial sample size was estimated using Cochran's formula, with a 95% confidence level, a 5% margin of error and an assumed population proportion of .50. The initial estimate of 384 was multiplied by a design effect of 1.5, giving 576. An allowance of about 11% for non-response then

gave a planned sample of 640 respondents. During fieldwork, 640 questionnaires were administered, of which 612 were recovered and analysed, a response rate of 95.6%.

2.3 Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire, the Indigenous and Traditional Education and Community Development Questionnaire (ITEDCDQ). Although this was the original instrument title, the variables analysed in the present study were community participation, cultural preservation, the role of traditional rulers and perceived community development; indigenous and traditional education was not treated as a separate measured construct.

The questionnaire covered five areas: community participation, cultural preservation, the role of traditional rulers, perceived community development and respondents' demographic characteristics. Community participation covered involvement in decision making, community planning, implementation of development activities, monitoring, resource mobilisation and collective activities. Cultural preservation covered the use of indigenous languages, customs, values, folklore, traditional knowledge and cultural practices. The role of traditional rulers covered community mobilisation, conflict resolution, communication of community interests, cultural education, coordination and support for development activities. Perceived community development covered respondents' assessments of infrastructure, social services, local economic activities, environmental conditions, community welfare and social cohesion. These items measured perceptions rather than independently verified changes in infrastructure or socioeconomic conditions. The substantive items were rated on a five-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Each of the four substantive constructs was measured using six items, giving a total of 24 items across the four constructs.

Face and content validity were assessed by two experts in educational research, measurement and evaluation, and community development. The review focused on the relevance, clarity and suitability of the items, and the recommendations were used to improve the wording of the items before administration. A pilot test was conducted with 60 adult residents of communities outside those selected for the main study, and the pilot participants were excluded from the main study. Cronbach's alpha was used to estimate internal consistency. The coefficients were .750 for community participation, .880 for cultural preservation, .732 for the role of traditional rulers and .810 for perceived community development. All four exceeded the commonly used minimum of .70, indicating acceptable internal consistency.

2.4 Data Collection and Ethical Considerations

Data were collected with the assistance of trained research assistants, who were briefed on the purpose of the study, administration of the questionnaire, selection of respondents, informed

consent, confidentiality and the checking of completed questionnaires for omissions. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the University of Calabar Research Ethics Committee (Approval No. UNICAL/REC/2023/0245). Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed of the purpose of the study before completing the questionnaire. The identities of respondents and the names of the sampled communities are not disclosed in reporting the findings.

2.5 Data Analysis

Completed questionnaires were coded and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Frequencies and percentages were used to describe the respondents. Composite scores were calculated for each of the four constructs from the relevant questionnaire items. Perceived community development was the outcome variable; a composite mean below 3.00 was classified as low/moderate and 3.00 or above as high. This threshold is the lower limit of the "agree" response band on the five-point scale and is an author-defined cut-off. The three explanatory variables, namely community participation, cultural preservation and the role of traditional rulers, were classified as low, moderate or high based on their composite mean scores. Scores below 3.00 were classified as low, scores equal to 3.00 as moderate, and scores above 3.00 as high. The threshold of 3.00 was derived from the midpoint of the five-point Likert response scale.

Chi-square tests of independence examined the bivariate associations between each explanatory variable and perceived community development, and Cramer's V assessed their strength. No cell had an expected frequency below 5. Binary logistic regression then examined the adjusted associations, with the three explanatory variables entered simultaneously. Low/moderate perceived community development was coded 0 and high was coded 1, and the lowest category of each explanatory variable was the reference category. Results are reported as regression coefficients (B), standard errors, Wald statistics, p values, odds ratios and 95% confidence intervals. The model chi-square tested whether the model improved on the intercept-only model, and Nagelkerke's pseudo-R^2 was reported as an index of fit; it is not interpreted as the proportion of variance explained as in linear regression. Significance was assessed at the .05 level. The VIF values ranged from 1.51 to 1.74, while tolerance values ranged from 0.575 to 0.662. All VIF values were below the commonly accepted threshold of 5.00, and all tolerance values exceeded 0.20, indicating that multicollinearity was not a concern among the explanatory variables. The regression model therefore satisfied the multicollinearity assumption. Statistical significance was assessed at the .05 level.

Respondents were drawn from 24 communities, so their observations may not be fully independent. The logistic regression was a single-level model, and its standard errors were not adjusted for clustering at community level (see Limitations). Because of the cross-sectional design and self-reported perceptions, the findings are interpreted as associations rather than causal effects.

3. Results

3.1 Respondents' Characteristics

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the 612 respondents. Males (330; 53.9%) slightly outnumbered females (282; 46.1%). The largest age group was 40–49 years (142; 23.2%), followed by 30–39 years (128; 20.9%), 50–59 years (124; 20.3%), 60 years and above (116; 19.0%) and 18–29 years (102; 16.7%). Secondary education was the most common qualification (238; 38.9%), followed by tertiary (158; 25.8%), primary (142; 23.2%) and no formal education (74; 12.1%). Most respondents were married (401; 65.5%); 91 (14.9%) were single, 77 (12.6%) were divorced or separated and 43 (7.0%) were widowed. Trading and business was the most frequent occupation (156; 25.5%), followed by civil and public service (125; 20.4%), farming (111; 18.1%), artisan and skilled work (102; 16.7%), unemployment (62; 10.1%) and retirement (56; 9.2%).

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 612)

Characteristic	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Sex		
Male	330	53.9
Female	282	46.1
Age group (years)		
18–29	102	16.7
30–39	128	20.9
40–49	142	23.2
50–59	124	20.3
60 and above	116	19.0
Educational qualification		
No formal education	74	12.1
Primary education	142	23.2
Secondary education	238	38.9
Tertiary education	158	25.8
Marital status		
Single	91	14.9
Married	401	65.5
Widowed	43	7.0
Divorced or separated	77	12.6
Occupation		
Civil/public service	125	20.4
Trading/business	156	25.5
Artisan/skilled work	102	16.7
Farming	111	18.1
Unemployed	62	10.1
Retired	56	9.2
Total	612	100.0

3.2 Level of Perceived Community Development

Perceived community development was calculated as a composite mean of the five-point Likert items and dichotomised at 3.50 (scores below 3.50 were low/moderate; 3.50 or above, high). This dichotomy is an author-defined threshold and should be interpreted cautiously. Of the 612 respondents, 400 (65.4%) reported low/moderate perceived community development and 212 (34.6%) reported high perceived community development (Table 2).

Table 2
Level of Perceived Community Development

Level of perceived community development	f	%
Low/moderate	400	65.4
High	212	34.6
Total	612	100.0

Note. N = 612.

3.3 Community Participation and Perceived Community Development

A chi-square test indicated an association between community participation and perceived community development, $\chi^2(2) = 108.33$, $p < .001$, $V = .421$. The proportion reporting high perceived community development increased from 10.4% in the low-participation group to 26.6% in the moderate group and 59.6% in the high group (Table 3). H_o1 was rejected.

Table 3
Community Participation and Perceived Community Development

Community participation	Low/moderate development, f (%)	High development, f (%)	Total, f (%)
Low	138 (89.6)	16 (10.4)	154 (100.0)
Moderate	171 (73.4)	62 (26.6)	233 (100.0)
High	91 (40.4)	134 (59.6)	225 (100.0)
Total	400 (65.4)	212 (34.6)	612 (100.0)

Note. $\chi^2(2) = 108.33$, $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .421$.

3.4 Cultural Preservation and Perceived Community Development

Cultural preservation was associated with perceived community development, $\chi^2(2) = 99.05$, $p < .001$, $V = .402$. The proportion reporting high perceived community development was 13.2% in the low-preservation group, 24.0% in the moderate group and 57.9% in the high group (Table 4). H_o2 was rejected.

Table 4

Cultural Preservation and Perceived Community Development

Cultural preservation	Low/moderate development, f (%)	High development, f (%)	Total, f (%)
Low	131 (86.8)	20 (13.2)	151 (100.0)
Moderate	168 (76.0)	53 (24.0)	221 (100.0)
High	101 (42.1)	139 (57.9)	240 (100.0)
Total	400 (65.4)	212 (34.6)	612 (100.0)

Note. $\chi^2(2) = 99.05$, $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .402$.

3.5 Role of Traditional Rulers and Perceived Community Development

The reported role of traditional rulers was associated with perceived community development, $\chi^2(2) = 100.77$, $p < .001$, $V = .406$. The proportion reporting high perceived community development was 14.9% in the low-role group, 21.8% in the moderate group and 57.9% in the high group (Table 5). $H_0 3$ was rejected.

Table 5

Role of Traditional Rulers and Perceived Community Development

Role of traditional rulers	Low/moderate development, f (%)	High development, f (%)	Total, f (%)
Low	131 (85.1)	23 (14.9)	154 (100.0)
Moderate	165 (78.2)	46 (21.8)	211 (100.0)
High	104 (42.1)	143 (57.9)	247 (100.0)
Total	400 (65.4)	212 (34.6)	612 (100.0)

Note. $\chi^2(2) = 100.77$, $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .406$.

3.6 Binary Logistic Regression

Binary logistic regression examined the adjusted associations of the three explanatory variables with the odds of reporting high perceived community development (Table 6). The model was statistically significant, $\chi^2(6) = 267.85$, $p < .001$, with Nagelkerke's pseudo-$R^2 = .339$.

After adjustment for the other two predictors, moderate community participation was associated with higher odds of reporting high perceived community development than low participation (OR = 3.08, 95% CI [1.59, 5.97], $p = .001$); the odds ratio for high participation was 12.39 (95% CI [6.42, 23.93], $p < .001$). Moderate cultural preservation was associated with higher odds than low preservation (OR = 2.03, 95% CI [1.07, 3.84], $p = .030$), as was high cultural preservation (OR = 8.69, 95% CI [4.69, 16.12], $p < .001$). The moderate category of the role of traditional rulers was not statistically significant after adjustment (OR = 1.62, 95% CI [0.87, 3.03], $p = .131$), whereas the high category was (OR = 7.95, 95% CI [4.39, 14.38], $p < .001$). High community participation had the largest odds ratio, followed by high cultural preservation and a high role of traditional rulers. These estimates describe associations, not causal effects, and the standard errors were not adjusted for community clustering.

Table 6

Binary Logistic Regression of Community Participation, Cultural Preservation and Role of Traditional Rulers on Perceived Community Development

Predictor	B	SE	Wald	p	OR	95% CI for OR
Community participation						
Moderate vs. low	1.125	0.338	11.09	.001	3.08	[1.59, 5.97]
High vs. low	2.517	0.336	56.18	< .001	12.39	[6.42, 23.93]
Cultural preservation						
Moderate vs. low	0.706	0.326	4.69	.030	2.03	[1.07, 3.84]
High vs. low	2.162	0.315	47.08	< .001	8.69	[4.69, 16.12]
Role of traditional rulers						
Moderate vs. low	0.483	0.320	2.27	.131	1.62	[0.87, 3.03]
High vs. low	2.073	0.303	46.94	< .001	7.95	[4.39, 14.38]

Note. N = 612. OR = odds ratio; CI = confidence interval. Reference categories were low community participation, low cultural preservation and low role of traditional rulers; df = 1 for each contrast. Model $\chi^2(6) = 267.85$, $p < .001$; Nagelkerke $R^2 = .339$. Standard errors were not adjusted for community clustering.

4. Discussion of Findings

Higher reported community participation was associated with higher perceived community development. The association was moderate in the bivariate analysis (V = .421), and the adjusted odds of being classified in the high perceived-development group were greater for respondents in the moderate and high participation categories than for those in the low category. This pattern is consistent with Abiona and Bello (2013), Haldane et al. (2019) and Akindoyeni et al. (2025), although these studies differ in setting and outcome. Participation may be more meaningful when residents help to identify needs, make decisions and monitor projects rather than only supplying labour or money, but the cross-sectional self-report data cannot establish that participation caused higher community development.

Communal activities, observation, storytelling and apprenticeship are recognised routes through which customary knowledge is transmitted (Boadu et al., 2021; Viscogliosi et al., 2020). These practices may help explain why participation and cultural preservation are relevant to community life, but the present study did not measure indigenous and traditional education directly, so this explanation is conceptual rather than a tested pathway.

Higher reported cultural preservation was also associated with higher perceived community development. The pattern is consistent with work on indigenous language and cultural transmission (Adedigba et al., 2023; Mudau, 2024) and with research linking cultural heritage, including local food heritage, to sustainable development (Boadu et al., 2021; Chukwurah et al., 2025). Shared language, practices and knowledge may support communication, belonging and cooperation. However, the questionnaire measured respondents' reports of cultural preservation and perceived development; it did not measure cultural transmission directly or establish a causal pathway.

The reported role of traditional rulers was associated with perceived community development in the bivariate analysis, consistent with research on traditional institutions and local mobilisation in Nigeria (Isokon et al., 2017; Omitola et al., 2021; Ashade & Osawe, 2025). Traditional rulers may support community life through mediation, cultural transmission and mobilisation (Ihemeje et al., 2016; Omitola et al., 2021). These functions may overlap with community participation and cultural preservation, which could partly explain why only the high category was statistically significant after adjustment (high: OR = 7.95, 95% CI [4.39, 14.38], $p < .001$; moderate: OR = 1.62, 95% CI [0.87, 3.03], $p = .131$). Because the study relied on respondents' reports, it cannot establish that leadership activities caused improvements in community development.

The joint model was statistically significant, $\chi^2(6) = 267.85$, $p < .001$, with Nagelkerke's pseudo-$R^2 = .339$, indicating that the three predictors considered together were associated with perceived community development. This index should not be read as the percentage of variance explained. The odds ratios are conditional associations rather than causal effects, and because the standard errors were not adjusted for clustering within communities, the confidence intervals should be interpreted cautiously.

5. Limitations of the Study

Several limitations should guide interpretation. First, the cross-sectional correlational design cannot establish temporal order or causation. Second, all principal variables were self-reported in the same questionnaire, creating possible recall, social-desirability and common-method bias. Third, categorising the Likert composite scores into low, moderate and high groups, and dichotomising perceived community development at 3.50, reduces information and makes the results dependent on the chosen cut-offs. Fourth, respondents were sampled within 24 communities, but the analysis did not adjust for clustering; standard errors and confidence intervals may therefore be too narrow. Fifth, perceived community development is not equivalent to independently verified change in infrastructure, services or welfare. Finally, the study was restricted to Calabar Municipality, so the findings should not automatically be generalised to other local government areas.

6. Conclusion

Community participation, cultural preservation and the reported role of traditional rulers were each associated with perceived community development among the adult residents surveyed in Calabar Municipality. In the adjusted model, high participation, high cultural preservation and a high reported role of traditional rulers were associated with greater odds of reporting high perceived community development; the moderate role category was not statistically significant. Because the design was cross-sectional and the variables were self-reported, the findings do not establish causal relationships. Indigenous and traditional learning may be relevant to the broader discussion of

communal knowledge and cultural transmission, but it was not measured as a separate variable and cannot be claimed as an empirical predictor in this study.

7. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Calabar Municipality Local Government Council and community development associations should involve residents in identifying needs, setting priorities, planning projects and monitoring implementation, rather than limiting participation to labour or financial contributions.
2. The Cross River State Ministry of Culture and Tourism, community development associations and local cultural organisations should support voluntary intergenerational transmission of indigenous languages, oral traditions, crafts and local knowledge, while ensuring that activities are inclusive and responsive to residents.
3. Local government authorities should involve traditional rulers in consultation, conflict resolution, communication and coordination of development activities, with clearly defined responsibilities and appropriate institutional support.
4. Community development plans should integrate resident participation, cultural preservation and traditional institutions where locally appropriate, while retaining transparent decision-making, inclusive representation and accountability.
5. Future evaluations should combine residents' perceptions with independent indicators of infrastructure, services and local welfare, and should use analyses that account for clustering when data are sampled within communities.

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