



Institutions, Public Policy and Community Development in South-East Nigeria

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Abstract

Community development in South-East Nigeria is uneven across states and local government areas. This study examined the relationship between institutional quality and public policy implementation as well as the impact of public policy implementation on community development. A cross-sectional survey research design was adopted in this study. A total of 400 respondents made up of civil servants, community leaders, policy practitioners and residents were selected from the five states of the South-East region of Nigeria. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and ordinary least squares regression. The findings of the study revealed positive and significant relationship between institutional quality and public policy implementation ($\beta = 0.61$, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, public policy implementation significantly predicted community development outcomes ($\beta = 0.54$, $p < 0.001$). The study also found that Anambra State recorded the highest mean community development score of 58.4% while Ebonyi State recorded the lowest mean community development score of 44.6%. The study therefore concludes that weak institutional structures impede effective public policy and consequently hinder community development. The study recommends enhanced budgetary accountability and sustained community engagement in policy processes to bridge the gap between policy design and community outcomes in the South-East region of Nigeria.

Keywords: Institutions; Public Policy Implementation; Community Development; South-East Nigeria; Local Governance

Introduction

The South-East of Nigeria is a highly commercial region in Africa, home to a centuries old Igbo apprenticeship system, an ever-increasing number of small and medium scale enterprises, and powerful indigenous systems of governance (Eberechi et al., 2026; Opute et al., 2021). However, many of the basic community development indicators for the region are below the national average for most areas (Ogu & Nebo, 2025; Nwodo et al., 2025). This huge disparity between the region's structural capacity and its community outcomes is systemic in nature.

Public institutions matter. They set the rules; they create incentives; they implement mechanisms of enforcement and sanctions to make sure those policies are translated into practice. In the absence of public institutions of adequate quality, policies are not implemented. In some cases, lack of effective implementation of policies is attributed to corruption. However, corruption is only one of the many problems that plague public institutions in most parts of sub-Saharan Africa (Mohammed et al., 2024; Atisa et al., 2020). In South-East Nigeria, where this study was conducted, multiple governance structures exist at different levels and at different times. For decades, local governments have been captured by the state while formal institutions of governance at different levels are in conflict with a plethora of community-based informal organizations including town unions and ethnic organizations such as the Ohanaeze Ndigbo (Emenike & Uzor, 2023; Okorie et al., 2022).

The three aspects of governance, i.e. the quality of institutions, policy implementation and community development are usually studied within separate research fields. As a result, most studies on community development at the community level are loosely related to studies on the quality of institutions and on policy implementation. This study, however, follows a sequential approach in which the quality of institutions is first analyzed, then the quality of policy implementation, and finally the quality of community development.

Two objectives guide the inquiry. First, the study examines how institutional quality influences public policy implementation in South-East Nigeria. Second, it assesses the effect of public policy implementation on community development outcomes across the five states of the region. The study draws on primary survey data from 400 respondents across Anambra, Enugu, Imo, Abia, and Ebonyi States, analysed through descriptive statistics and regression modelling.

Literature Review

Conceptual Clarifications

Institution in this study refers to the rules, organizations and mechanisms of implementation and control that channel human actions to deal with public issues in the public domain (Adekola et al., 2023). Formal organizations, including government agencies at the federal, state or local government levels, are what people normally mean by “institutions.” However, the concept also encompasses the structures, the incentives, and the capacity that these organizations work with. Thus, for the purpose of this study, the norms that guide human behavior within institutions as well as the programs and activities that these institutions engage in are what are referred to (Anam, 2026; Inakefe et al., 2024).

Public policy in this study refers to decisions of government and actions by other entities of the public sector to address public or social problems and to accomplish public objectives by allocating resources for achieving goals (Ibi et al., 2025; Olowu, 2025). Public policy implementation refers to the processes of translation of decisions into actions at the community level and it is in this translation process that failures of public policy occur. As Abdullahi et al. (2023) noted in their work on the failures of public policy implementation in the Nigerian secondary education sector, failures of public policy implementation in sector occur not essentially because of failures in public policy decisions but because of failures in the institutional environment within which such translation is expected to occur. Likewise, Aisha and Isaac (2026) noted similar observation on the implementation of Universal Basic Education program.

Community development refers to good changes within and around communities in terms of physical and social environment. The physical dimension of community development focuses on structural aspect such as physical infrastructure such as good network of roads, potable water, healthcare services, good electricity supply and adequate educational facilities among others. The social dimension of community development on the other hand seeks to empower communities and give them the opportunity to express themselves and be heard in all human endeavors especially those that affect their lives and overall well-being (Awoonor, 2025; Ogu et al., 2025). This is how community development is viewed and practiced in many sub-Saharan Africa countries (Azibo & Sonkey, 2023; Chinweikpe, 2024).

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on the Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) Framework developed by Elinor Ostrom and her collaborators. The IAD Framework is used to explain how community outcomes are determined by the action arena(s) through which actors, including policy implementers, act. Action arenas are shaped by rules-in-use, by biophysical conditions and by attributes of the community in which action takes place (Adekola et al., 2023). For this study on South-East Nigeria, the formal rules on local government institutions and the informal rules that accompany these formal rules constitute the space of action of actors including policy implementers and community members (Adekola et al., 2023).

By utilizing the IAD framework, I treat the institutional quality variable as endogenous and focus on the manner in which it shapes the actions of policy actors and affects their incentives. The quality of institutions rules could be high and therefore subject policy implementers to great accountability and clear performance goals. In contrast institutions could be very weak thus affecting policy implementers in greatly different ways than in those locations with high quality institutional structures. Indeed studies on governance and policy implementation have become a major area of research in several developing countries including Ghana (Mohammed et al., 2024), Uganda (Mayanja & Akunda, 2023), and Nigeria (Ogunnubi, 2022; Eze, 2026).

Institutional Quality and Governance in Nigeria

The subnational or local institutional space in Nigeria is characterized by ‘decentralisation without devolution’ (Ogunnubi, 2022). The local government councils are mere establishments of local governance at the subnational space in Nigeria. They are not real institutions because they lack the necessary fiscal autonomy, human capital and the enabling legal environment to function as institutions. The legal environment within which the local government councils operate are under the control of the state governments and as such the allocations to them are determined by the state governments and as and when due (Oluwasanmi, 2025; Okorie et al., 2022).

The implications for institutional quality. Firstly, lack of qualified personnel has been identified as the major constraint to effective service delivery at the Local Government level (Bello and Mackson, 2022). Moreover, bureaucratic reforms in Nigeria have not yielded sustainable improvements in institutional performance (Muhammadu et al., 2025). The major reason for this is that most reforms have focused on structures within institutions rather than the incentives within these structures that determine human behavior. Finally, governance failure in Nigeria is more of failure of institutions to connect with the communities that they are supposed to govern and serve rather than the absence of institutions (Momoh et al., 2025).

In the South-East specifically, institutional legitimacy is further complicated by the presence of separatist agitations, which have eroded public trust in federal and state institutions (Nnam, 2024; Onwuharaonye et al., 2025; Ugwueze, 2021). Eze (2026) found that electronic governance initiatives in selected South-East public institutions produced measurable improvements in performance, but their reach was constrained by infrastructure deficits and institutional resistance to transparency mechanisms.

Public Policy Implementation in South-East Nigeria

Studying policy implementation in Nigeria from different angles, the existing body of work on the subject matter revealed that shortages in policy implementation were not just occasional failures in implementing policies and programs but rather a system-wide problem and thus a pervasive failing (Sukare & Usman, 2026; Ibi et al., 2025). This failing is obvious in the rural development efforts of the government as pronounced in the policies and programs of government. For example, a study carried out in the South-East geo-political zone of Nigeria, focused on selected states and how they affected the rural communities, revealed that the areas were not really feeling the impact of development as promised by policies and programs of government.

Aisha & Isaac (2026) examined how Universal Basic Education program is able to improve quality of education. According to the researchers, several institutional constraints impede the programs from achieving their objectives. These constraints include inadequate number of staff, and lack of release of funds as well as poor coordination amongst federal and state actors and facilities that are mandated to implement the programs. Inakefe et al. (2024) examined how inadequate institutional readiness can affect digitalized governance reforms in Cross River State. In summary, all these studies taught a very important lesson to policy makers. Quality policy at design stage is crucial but not sufficient for the policy to have the desired impact. The reality of implementation of any policy is shaped by the institutions that are designed and exist to implement the policy.

Olowu (2025) argued that sustainable development in Nigeria requires not merely better policies but a fundamentally different approach to policy governance, one that builds institutional accountability into the implementation chain from the outset. Ogu et al. (2025) made the specific case for participatory implementation mechanisms in rural South-East communities, finding that community involvement in project monitoring was associated with higher rates of project completion.

Community Development Outcomes in the South-East

Industrial companies operating in South-East Nigeria encounter unsatisfactory social conditions. These social conditions concern the supply of electricity, the development of roads as well as the supply of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) on insufficient terms which are burdening companies' performance (Nwodo et al., 2025). Serious lack of infrastructure also prevails in the Ebonyi South Senatorial Zone of Ebonyi State in South-East Nigeria. Inadequate development of infrastructure in the area is traced to governance weakness at local government level as well as to inadequate implementation of policies (Eze et al., 2025).

There are numerous literature that talk about community participation in development and its outcomes in sub-Saharan African region (Awoonor, 2025; Arisem Arisukwu et al., 2020; Kamusiime, 2023). However, community participation in development in South-East, Nigeria is affected by issues of insecurity and institutional distrust and therefore does not fit into the models of participation in development as noted in literature (Eyisi et al., 2020; Ifatimehin et al., 2025). Democratic decentralization is noted to be the most promising approach to enhancing

community outcomes in twenty-first century Nigeria (Chinweikpe, 2024). However, the existing institutional framework undermines this potential.

The literature thus converges on a chain of effects: institutional quality determines implementation capacity, implementation capacity determines the reach and quality of public services, and service reach determines community development outcomes. This study tests that chain empirically in the South-East Nigeria context.

Methodology

Research Design and Study Area

This study employed cross-sectional survey approach within the specified framework. Cross-sectional studies are typical for assessing people's attitudes, perceptions, experiences or behaviors at a single point in time among a population. The study focused on five states of South-Eastern region of Nigeria where the research was conducted, namely Anambra, Enugu, Imo, Abia and Ebonyi States. The five study states are in South-East of Nigeria where the researcher is from. Though the five study states are from the same geopolitical zone with common culture, each of the states has her own history, economy, level of development and also Community Development structures and practices. Hence, cross-state comparison is necessary and appropriate.

Population, Sampling, and Sample Size

The study targeted civil servants at local government and state levels, community development officials of community development projects, elected councilors, traditional rulers, community leaders and ordinary citizens of South-East Nigeria who have contact with public sector organizations in the five states of the region. Using the five states in the study, a stratified random sample of respondents was selected proportionately from the five states and both urban and rural locations were covered in each of the strata. Of the 420 questionnaires distributed for the study, 400 were completed and therefore can be used for the purposes of the study. Thus the study has a sample size of 400 and a corresponding response rate of 95.2%.

Instrument and Variables

A structured questionnaire was developed in three sections. Section A captured demographic characteristics. Section B measured institutional quality using a 12-item scale adapted from established governance assessment instruments (Inakefe et al., 2024; Amin et al., 2024), covering transparency, accountability, rule of law, and local government capacity. Section C measured public policy implementation quality using a 10-item scale, and community development outcomes using a 14-item scale covering infrastructure access, healthcare, education, water, and community participation. All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Scale scores were aggregated and standardized to a 0-100 index for comparability.

Content validity was established through expert review by three academics in public administration and community development. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha: institutional quality ($\alpha = 0.83$), policy implementation ($\alpha = 0.81$), and community development outcomes ($\alpha = 0.86$), all exceeding the accepted threshold of 0.70.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using IBM SPSS version 27. Descriptive statistics, specifically means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions, were generated for all scale variables. To address Objective 1, ordinary least squares (OLS) regression was used to examine the relationship between institutional quality (independent variable) and public policy implementation (dependent variable). To address Objective 2, a second OLS regression was run with policy implementation as the independent variable and community development outcomes as the dependent variable. In both models, state of residence, respondent category, and years of experience were entered as control variables.

Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary, informed, and anonymous. No personal identifiers were collected. Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional review board prior to data collection. All data were stored securely and used exclusively for the purposes of this study.

Table 1 Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 400)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	248	62.0
	Female	152	38.0
Age (years)	18-30	74	18.5
	31-45	178	44.5
	46-60	116	29.0
	61 and above	32	8.0
Respondent Category	Civil Servant (State)	118	29.5
	Civil Servant (LGA)	97	24.3
	Community Leader	84	21.0
	Resident/Community Member	101	25.3
State	Anambra	86	21.5
	Enugu	82	20.5
	Imo	79	19.8
	Abia	78	19.5
	Ebonyi	75	18.8
Years of Experience	Less than 5	88	22.0
	5-10	136	34.0
	11-20	112	28.0
	Above 20	64	16.0

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 presents the institutional quality ratings provided by respondents across the five states. The regional mean institutional quality score was 53.2 out of 100, indicating a moderate institutional environment. Anambra State recorded the highest mean score (61.4), while Ebonyi recorded the lowest (43.7). Standard deviations were relatively high across all states, reflecting considerable within-state variation in respondents' experiences of institutional quality. Transparency and accountability sub-scores were consistently lower than rule of law and organisational capacity sub-scores across all five states.

Table 2 Institutional Quality Ratings by State (Mean Scores, Scale: 0-100)

State	Transparency	Accountability	Rule of Law	LGA Capacity	Overall IQ Score
Anambra	62.1	59.8	65.3	58.4	61.4
Enugu	55.3	53.1	60.2	52.7	55.3
Imo	49.6	47.2	55.8	48.4	50.3
Abia	51.4	49.8	57.1	50.2	52.1
Ebonyi	42.3	40.6	48.9	43.1	43.7
Regional Mean	52.1	50.1	57.5	50.6	52.6

Table 3 presents public policy implementation scores. The regional mean was 50.4, again reflecting a broadly moderate but variable implementation environment. Anambra outperformed the regional average on all sub-dimensions, while Ebonyi scored below 45 on four of five dimensions. The community participation sub-dimension scored lowest across all states (regional mean: 43.7), suggesting that participatory mechanisms remain the weakest link in the policy implementation chain in the South-East.

Table 3 Public Policy Implementation Scores by State (Mean Scores, Scale: 0-100)

State	Policy Design	Budget Release	Monitoring	Stakeholder Engagement	Community Participation	Overall PPI Score
Anambra	60.2	58.4	57.6	55.3	52.1	56.7
Enugu	54.1	52.0	51.3	48.7	46.2	50.5
Imo	48.3	46.5	44.8	43.1	40.0	44.5
Abia	50.6	48.9	47.2	45.3	42.4	46.9
Ebonyi	42.1	40.3	38.7	37.4	33.8	38.5
Regional Mean	51.1	49.2	47.9	46.0	42.9	47.4

Table 4 presents community development outcome indicators. Infrastructure access recorded the lowest regional mean (43.1), while healthcare access, educational facility availability, and community participation in governance all scored below 55. Anambra again led across most dimensions, with a composite community development score of 58.4. Ebonyi's composite score of 44.6 was 13.8 points below the regional mean of 51.6. Figure 1 visualises the composite community development scores by state.

Table 4 Community Development Outcome Indicators by State (Mean Scores, Scale: 0-100)

State	Infrastructure	Healthcare	Education	Water/Sanitation	Community Participation	Composite CDI
Anambra	55.3	61.2	60.4	58.7	56.4	58.4
Enugu	50.1	56.3	55.8	54.2	54.3	54.1
Imo	40.7	51.3	50.6	49.4	56.5	49.7
Abia	42.6	53.1	52.4	51.8	58.6	51.3
Ebonyi	26.8	45.2	46.3	47.1	57.6	44.6
Regional Mean	43.1	53.4	53.1	52.2	56.7	51.6

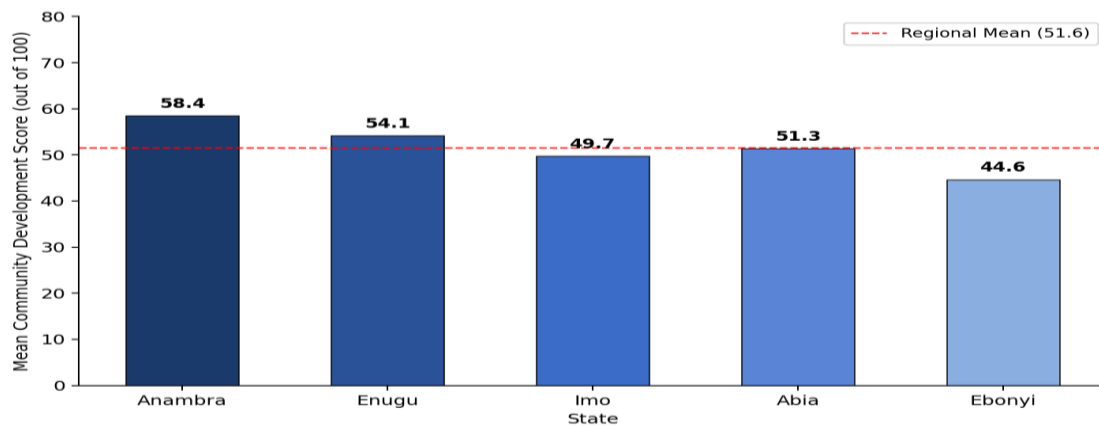


Figure 1. Community development outcome scores by state in South-East Nigeria.

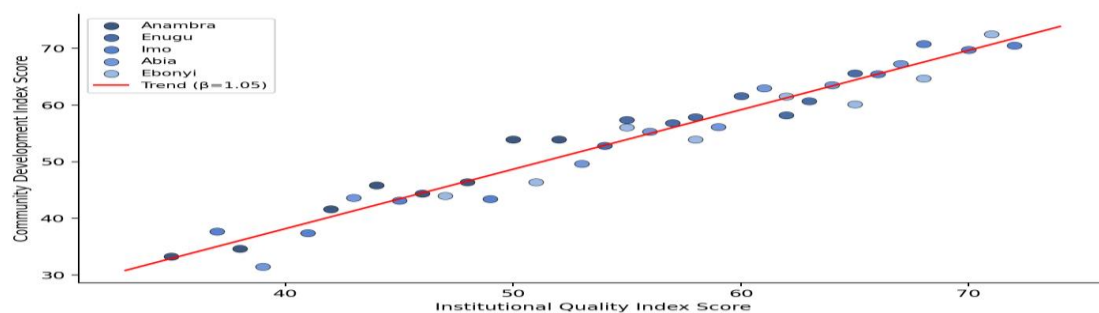


Figure 2. Scatter plot of institutional quality index vs. community development index by state.

Inferential Statistics

Table 5 presents the regression results for Objective 1: the effect of institutional quality on public policy implementation. The model was statistically significant ($F(4, 395) = 48.73$, $p < 0.001$) and explained 33.1% of the variance in policy implementation scores ($R^2 = 0.331$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.324$). Institutional quality was a positive and significant predictor of policy implementation ($\beta = 0.61$, $t = 11.24$, $p < 0.001$). Among the control variables, years of experience ($\beta = 0.14$, $p = 0.019$) and respondent category (specifically LGA civil servants relative to state civil servants) showed a significant negative association ($\beta = -0.12$, $p = 0.031$), consistent with the pattern of lower implementation capacity at the local government level documented in the descriptive analysis.

Table 5 Regression Results: Institutional Quality Predicting Public Policy Implementation ($N = 400$) Note. $R^2 = .331$; Adjusted $R^2 = .324$; $F(4, 395) = 48.73$, $p < .001$.

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Constant	12.43	3.21		3.87	< .001
Institutional Quality (IQ)	0.63	0.056	0.61	11.24	< .001
State (ref: Anambra)	-	-	-	-	-
Respondent Category (LGA vs State)	-4.82	2.23	-0.12	-2.16	.031
Years of Experience	1.14	0.48	0.14	2.37	.019
Gender	0.87	1.12	0.04	0.78	.439

Table 6 presents the regression results for Objective 2: the effect of public policy implementation on community development outcomes. This model was also statistically significant ($F(4, 395) = 39.16, p < 0.001$), accounting for 28.4% of variance in community development outcomes ($R^2 = 0.284$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.277$). Policy implementation was a positive and significant predictor of community development ($\beta = 0.54, t = 9.87, p < 0.001$). State of residence emerged as significant in this model, with Ebonyi showing a significant negative effect relative to Anambra ($\beta = -0.18, p = 0.004$), consistent with the descriptive findings in Table 4.

Table 6 Regression Results: Public Policy Implementation Predicting Community Development Outcomes

($N = 400$) Note. $R^2 = .284$; Adjusted $R^2 = .277$; $F(4, 395) = 39.16, p < .001$.

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Constant	14.72	3.84		3.83	< .001
Policy Implementation (PPI)	0.57	0.058	0.54	9.87	< .001
State: Ebonyi (ref: Anambra)	-7.34	2.57	-0.18	-2.86	.004
State: Imo (ref: Anambra)	-3.61	2.31	-0.09	-1.56	.119
Years of Experience	0.96	0.51	0.11	1.89	.060
Gender	1.04	1.19	0.05	0.87	.386

Discussion

Institutional Quality and Public Policy Implementation

The study aimed to assess the impact of institutional quality on public policy implementation in the South-East region of Nigeria. The institutional quality variable was used as independent variable while policy implementation was used as the dependent variable in the regression analysis conducted to achieve the objectives of the study. The results of the regression analysis indicated a positive and significant relationship between the independent variable of institutional quality and policy implementation ($\beta = .61, p < .001$). Thus, the independent variable of institutional quality explained a large amount of variance in the policy implementation scores of the study. A growing body of research emanating from sub-Saharan Africa including Nigeria has reached similar conclusions. For example, Mohammed and others (2024) in their study conducted in Ghana identified institutional capacity at the district level as the strongest predictor of local government performance. Also, Eze (2026) in his study on performance of electronic governance within institutions in the South-East region of Nigeria found that institutional readiness determined performance of electronic governance within institutions in the region as against other variables including technology.

There are also considerable inter-state differences in the institutional quality scores of the South-East states. The mean scores for Anambra and Ebonyi States were 61.4 and 43.7 respectively on a 100-point scale. The difference of 18 points between the two highest and lowest scoring states translates into predicted differences of some 11 points in the scores for policy-implementation by the two states. These differences in scores would also translate into considerable differences in community development outcomes. The connections between these variables and the evidence from various stages of analysis are real.

The particularly low scores on community participation sub-dimensions across all five states (regional mean: 43.7) deserve attention. Participation is not peripheral to institutional quality in the IAD framework; it is integral to the feedback loops that allow institutions to learn and self-correct (Adekola et al., 2023). Arisukwu et al. (2020) found that community participation in crime prevention in rural Nigeria was associated with improved security outcomes, suggesting that participatory mechanisms can work when properly supported. Awoonor (2025) made a similar argument for rural development projects. The problem in the South-East appears to be not a lack of community willingness but a lack of institutional infrastructure for genuine participation.

The negative coefficient for LGA civil servants relative to state civil servants ($\beta = -0.12$, $p = 0.031$) is also telling. It reflects the well-documented capacity deficit at the local government level in Nigeria (Bello & Mackson, 2022; Oluwasanmi, 2025). Local governments are the primary institutional interface between state policy and community reality, yet they consistently operate with fewer resources, less qualified staff, and weaker accountability systems than state-level agencies. Sukare and Mai-Ulu (2026) described this as a structural flaw in Nigeria's administrative reform architecture; reforms rarely reach the local level in any meaningful form.

Public Policy Implementation and Community Development Outcomes

The second objective examined the effect of public policy implementation on community development outcomes. The regression confirmed a positive and significant relationship ($\beta = 0.54$, $p < 0.001$). Put plainly: places where policy implementation is more effective show better community development outcomes. This is perhaps the most policy-relevant finding of the study, because it identifies implementation, rather than policy design per se, as the proximate driver of community conditions.

Ogu et al. (2025) evaluated rural development policy in selected South-East states and found that communities receiving more consistent policy implementation reported better infrastructure and social service access. Ogu and Nebo (2025) extended this analysis and found that the effect was strongest for communities where local government capacity was higher. The current study's findings align with both. Infrastructure access recorded the lowest regional mean (43.1) of all community development dimensions, a result that reflects the chronic capital underspending documented in South-East local government budgets (Nwodo et al., 2025; Chinweikpe, 2024).

Ebonyi's significant negative coefficient ($\beta = -0.18$, $p = 0.004$) relative to Anambra deserves specific attention. Even controlling for policy implementation quality, Ebonyi showed lower community development outcomes than the regression model would predict based on implementation scores alone. This residual effect likely reflects Ebonyi's distinct geographic and historical disadvantages: the state has the highest poverty rate in the zone, the weakest urban infrastructure base, and the most recently consolidated institutional framework following its creation in 1996 (Eze et al., 2025). Policy implementation improvements will be necessary but not sufficient for Ebonyi; supplementary investment in baseline community infrastructure appears warranted.

The community participation dimension showed the highest mean score across community development outcome indicators (regional mean: 56.7), despite being the weakest in the implementation chain. This apparent contradiction is worth noting. Communities in South-East Nigeria report relatively high participation in governance processes, but that participation does not translate into better service delivery outcomes at the same rate. One interpretation is that participation occurs primarily in informal and community-based forums (town union meetings, church committees, Ohanaeze Ndigbo structures) rather than through formal policy channels (Emenike & Uzor, 2023; Eyisi et al., 2020). Formal policy institutions in the region have not yet built the interface mechanisms to capture and respond to that community energy.

Novelty, Limitations, and Future Research

This study contributes to the literature in two respects. It tests the sequential chain from institutional quality through policy implementation to community development outcomes using primary survey data from all five South-East states, rather than relying on secondary data or single-state case studies. And it identifies community participation in formal policy processes, as distinct from community participation in informal structures, as the weakest link in the chain, a finding with direct operational implications.

Several limitations qualify these contributions. The cross-sectional design does not permit causal inference in the strict sense; the regression findings are consistent with the proposed direction of effects, but longitudinal data would strengthen the argument. Perception-based Likert scales, while widely used in this literature (Mohammed et al., 2024; Ogu et al., 2025), carry the risk of common method bias, and future studies should consider incorporating administrative records or expenditure data alongside survey instruments. The study was also limited to the five South-East states, and comparisons with other geopolitical zones would enrich the analysis.

Future research should examine the role of informal governance institutions in the South-East, specifically how town unions and traditional councils interact with formal policy processes to produce community outcomes. The apparent disconnect between high informal participation and low formal implementation responsiveness is a productive research problem that the current data can only flag, not resolve.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine how institutional quality influences public policy implementation in South-East Nigeria, and how policy implementation in turn shapes community development outcomes. The evidence is clear on both counts. Institutional quality significantly predicts implementation quality ($\beta = 0.61$), and implementation quality significantly predicts community development outcomes ($\beta = 0.54$). Anambra State leads the region on both chains; Ebonyi lags, and does so by a margin that cannot be attributed to any single factor.

The practical message for policymakers and institutional managers is direct. Investing in policy design without first addressing institutional capacity (transparency, accountability, local government staffing, and monitoring systems) is unlikely to produce the community development outcomes that South-East communities need. Conversely, communities with

stronger institutional environments do see better implementation outcomes, and better implementation does reach communities in the form of improved infrastructure, healthcare, and educational access.

Three policy recommendations follow from the findings. First, state and federal governments should prioritize institutional capacity building at the local government level, with specific attention to qualified personnel retention and financial accountability mechanisms. Second, formal community participation channels need to be strengthened so that the high informal engagement that characterises South-East communities can be channelled into the policy implementation process. Third, Ebonyi State requires targeted supplementary investment in baseline community infrastructure, over and above improvements in institutional quality and policy implementation, given its historical developmental disadvantage.

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