

Correlation Between Youth Empowerment Scheme and Poverty Reduction in Dekina LGA

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Abstract

This study examines youth empowerment programs and poverty reduction in Dekina, Kogi State, Nigeria. Youth empowerment programs improve skills, finances, and employment opportunities to reduce poverty. Researchers use quantitative methods. Research links youth empowerment to poverty reduction. Vocational training, entrepreneurial rewards, and educational support have raised beneficiaries' incomes and promoted economic independence. However, limited financing, poor implementation, and no monitoring methods hinder these programs. The research recommends increased government-commercial sector collaboration, program oversight, and sustainable funding for youth empowerment initiatives. Improving these measures will boost economic stability and reduce poverty in Dekina LGA and beyond. Given its effectiveness in Anyigba, Ajaokuta, and Oguma/Bassa Nge, the poverty alleviation initiative should expand to a bigger population and stop focusing on its current regions. YEP needs constant access to resources to meet public expectations.

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Background to the Study

Youth empowerment has emerged as a vital strategy in addressing poverty across various regions of Nigeria, particularly in Kogi State. Kogi, situated in the central region of the country, has long grappled with socio-economic challenges, including high poverty rates and limited employment opportunities. In recent years, several youth empowerment schemes have been implemented in a bid to address these issues. Poverty has been a central topic in current discussions on society. This is due to the fact that poverty has significant economic, social, and political consequences. The impoverished population seems to suffer from economic deprivation, social isolation, and political exclusion. Poverty is the state of not having sufficient access to fundamental necessities, such as sustenance, housing, and attire. The poor are defined as persons or households in a specific society who are unable to fulfill specific essential demands and access necessary services. Essential requirements encompass sustenance, lodging, water, medical care, and absence of educational opportunities, vocational training and resources, as well as the entitlement to engage in socio-economic discussions with political and civic rights (Obi and Uche, 2019). There is a consensus that poverty is often characterized by low income or low consumption. Currently, poverty is recognized as a prevalent global issue due to the estimated number of over four billion individuals living in poverty worldwide. The majority of these individuals reside in developing nations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Due to the worldwide extent of poverty, the United Nations designated 1996 as the International Year for the Elimination of Poverty, and the period from 1997 to 2015 as the decade for eradicating poverty. To achieve this goal, governments in both wealthy and developing countries have become more conscious of the threat of poverty and have undertaken various initiatives globally to reduce poverty.

The poverty rate in Nigeria has significantly risen since the execution of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) initiated by the regime of General Ibrahim Babangida in the late 1980s. (NNDP Nigeria 1998, FOS 1999, World Bank 1999). Since 1990, the country has been categorised as a low-income nation. In the 2001 Human Development Index (HDI) by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Nigeria was rated 142nd with an HDI of 0.40, placing it among the world's poorest countries. Between 1980 and 1996, there was a significant surge in the population of impoverished Nigerians. According to FOS (1999), the proportion of those classified as core poor went from 62% in 1980 to 93% in 1996. In contrast, the percentage of moderately poor individuals only increased from 28.9% in 1992 to 36.3% in 1996. The concern over poverty, as well as the endeavours to eliminate or at the very least diminish it, can be deemed as longstanding. Although significant progress has been made in reducing poverty levels in other regions, emerging countries like Nigeria continue to struggle with poverty. Despite the implementation of various poverty alleviation programmes, there has been minimal or no change in the living conditions of the younger population.

The rising poverty rate in Nigeria and the imperative to eliminate it in order to enhance the quality of life for the population has prompted the development and execution of specific and general poverty eradication and alleviation initiatives. Both the Nigerian government and aid agencies have been actively engaged in analysing and seeking answers to the escalating poverty

rate in the country. The government has implemented various programmes and agencies to address poverty, such as the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructures (DFRFRI), the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), the People's Bank of Nigeria (PBN), the Better Life Programme (BLP), the Family Support Programme (FSP), the Agricultural Development Programme (ADP), and the National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA), among others. Following the restoration of democracy on May 29, 1999, the federal government initiated several poverty alleviation initiatives. In 2000, the government created the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP). The National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) was established in 2001 with the objective of eliminating poverty. It comprised four main initiatives, which were:

1. Youth Empowerment,
2. Social Welfare Service,
3. Rural Resources Development and
4. Conservation Scheme.

The administration prioritised cross-level cooperation, coordination, and complementarity across different levels of government as well as among donor agencies, non-governmental organisations, and local communities in order to carry out these projects. As said by Obadan in 2001 empowering young people is crucial because it has the ability to reduce youth unrest and make good use of the available labour force for national development goals. This means that the duty to empower youths around to achieve the national goal of socio-economic transformation of communities lies with all parties involved in the youth empowerment scheme, including the government, NGOs, religious organisations, parents, guardians, and elders. (Yoladele, 2003) For the youth to realize their potential and become valuable allies in the process of national development, everyone involved must work tirelessly and with unwavering resolve. Nevertheless, the character of the state's sociopolitical and economic climate determines the capacity of any stakeholder to empower youngsters.

Statement of Research Problem

Since the majority of people in developing and emerging economies of the world live in extreme poverty, the problem of eradicating poverty has been a significant obstacle to their progress. Nonetheless, governments everywhere have persisted in reacting in a number of ways to improve the impoverished apparently worsening situation by reallocating public funds to the fight against poverty. There was great hope for this. Eradicating poverty was viewed as a way for the government to restore the damaged economy and boost the confidence of most young people in Nigeria. According to estimates, more than 60% of Nigerians were living on less than \$1.90 per day (Bukola, 2019). As the most vulnerable segment of society, youth are most affected by this level of poverty. Nearly every essential item required for a respectable level of living is absent from them, including affordable education, a healthy diet, clothing, meaningful work, and good health care. In contrast, the youth are disproportionately vulnerable to poverty, largely due to the uncertain prospects and problems they encounter as they mature, especially with regard to the job market. The NAPEP and the NDE are the two main pillars of the poverty eradication programme that successive Nigerian governments have introduced. Despite this, the programmes have not significantly reduced

poverty in Nigeria, which is why more research is needed to determine the effectiveness of these interventions. This study aims to assess the effect of youth empowerment on poverty reduction in the communities of Ajaokuta, Anyigba, and Oguma/Bassange, stemming from the aforementioned issue. Nigeria is one of the poorest countries in the world, with a large section of its population living in extreme poverty, despite being the sixth-largest oil-producing nation in the world with an abundance of natural and human resources. Nigeria's efforts to achieve sustained national development are strongly impacted by her poverty predicament. Because of this, the study is significant from a theoretical and practical standpoint. The research will be helpful in developing policies related to poverty and in attempts to lessen its effects by using outcome-driven intervention strategies. The study's theoretical goal is to add to the body of information already available on the topic of youth empowerment programmes in order to help this important segment of the population of the country escape poverty. It will leave open-ended questions as a starting point for additional investigation.

Review of Related Empirical Studies

Several studies have investigated the financing of projects and its impact on poverty reduction and overall community development. Below, we will evaluate some of the studies that are currently accessible on these topics.

The Developmental Impact of Youth Empowerment in Nigeria

Several empirical studies have demonstrated the influence of youth empowerment on reducing poverty in Nigeria. In a research study titled "Addressing Youth Unemployment in Nigeria: the Lagos State Development and Empowerment Initiative," Emeh (2012) gathered data through the distribution of questionnaires to a randomly chosen sample of participants. The data was then analysed using basic percentage calculations. The study findings indicate that 78.5% of the respondents agree that there is unemployment in Nigeria. The majority of respondents, accounting for 92.6%, believed that unemployment in Nigeria mostly affects the youth. In regards to the correlation between youth empowerment and youth unemployment in Nigeria, 70.4% of the participants concurred that youth empowerment had a diminishing effect on youth unemployment specifically, as well as unemployment in Nigeria as a whole. Hence, the researcher suggested that due to the government's potential inability to generate sufficient employment opportunities for the large number of unemployed Nigerian young, it should instead initiate extensive youth empowerment initiatives.

Ohize and Adamu (2009) conducted a study on the Youth Empowerment Scheme of Niger State, Nigeria. They used a survey research design with questionnaires as the main method for collecting data. The study showcased the program's efficacy in equipping individuals with a wide range of vocational skills, empowering them to achieve self-reliance and enhance their ability to fulfil their responsibilities to their communities and Nigeria as a whole. The discovery also showcased the substantial impact of the programme in alleviating poverty in Niger state. Further research, named "Empowering rural youth: addressing rural-urban migration," The study conducted by Nnadi et al (2012) investigated the impact of youth empowerment on the migration of individuals from rural to urban regions in the Ethiope-east

region of Delta State. The data clearly showed that a substantial number of young people who move from rural to urban areas do so in order to seek better opportunities that will enable them to have more control over their own lives. The rural-urban mobility of young individuals has a negative effect on the development of rural communities. The consequences include a reduced Gross Domestic Product (GDP), an increase in social vices and crime, a slow rate of rural development, a weakening of family connections, and a decline in traditional and cultural values, among other effects. The study additionally discovered that providing rural youth with power and authority limits the movement of people from rural to urban areas, hence fostering the progress and advancement of rural regions.

In their study titled "The Effects of Youth Empowerment Strategies on Conflict Resolution in Niger Delta of Nigeria: Evidence from Cross River State," Ofem and Ajayi (2008) assessed the influence of youth empowerment tactics on conflict resolution by employing an ordered regression model. The study conducted in Cross River State utilised a multi-stage sampling procedure to choose around 200 youngsters as respondents. The data were gathered by a questionnaire and examined using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, mean values, and percentages. The results of the hypothesis testing showed that the education programme, provision of infrastructures, and credit facilities have a substantial impact on conflict resolution. However, employment and income did not have a significant impact, although having a favourable association.

In a separate study titled "Youth Empowerment for Sustainable Development: The Role of Entrepreneurship Education for Out of School Youth," Kolade et al. (2014) demonstrate that empowering young people through entrepreneurship education plays a significant role in achieving sustainable national development. The study identified additional advantages of youth empowerment, particularly through entrepreneurship education. These benefits encompass the promotion of economic growth at both the individual and national levels, the alleviation of poverty, the reduction of unemployment rates, the increase in per capita income, and the mitigation of social issues such as youth restiveness, cultism, armed robbery, vandalism of oil pipelines, kidnapping, insecurity of life and property, human trafficking, and prostitution.

Youth Participation in Rural Development

The study done by Okwoche, Age, and Alegwu (2012) in Benue State examined the level of youth engagement in different forms of rural development initiatives. The study randomly chose a total of 200 young individuals from the neighbourhood. The data was analysed using frequency distribution, percentage, and Pearson correlation. The hypothesis testing reveals a statistically significant correlation between socio-economic factors and involvement. Schooling achieved the highest level of engagement, reaching 96%, closely followed by religious activities and agricultural activities, both with a participation rate of 72%. Marketing, transportation, civil service, roads and housing development, mobile phone industry, and health achieved respective percentages of 70%, 64%, 64%, 56%, 52%, and 50%. They attribute the low degree of rural youth participation in these sports to the fact that they need a significant number of skills, strength, and safety precautions. The study findings indicate a

positive correlation between the level of youth involvement in rural development initiatives and the overall development of the area. Therefore, it suggests that promoting young involvement through educational campaigns would enhance the youth's motivation and broaden their range of activities. Moreover, it advocates for a consistent and dedicated approach from the federal, state, and local governments, which should be reflected in consistent financial and logistical assistance, in order to empower the young in rural communities and enable them to reach their full potential.

Ozei, Sezgin, and Topkaya (2013) examined the correlation between empowerment and unemployment in seven developed nations (G7). The data from 2000-2011 was analysed using panel regression analysis. The study findings indicate that during the three-crisis period, both productivity and women empowerment have substantial and influential effects on reducing unemployment. However, after the crisis, the impact of productivity becomes insignificant and minimal, while the effect of women empowerment on decreasing unemployment persists and intensifies.

Sadiku, Ibraimi & Sadiku (2015) conducted an empirical study to investigate the relationship between youth empowerment and economic growth in FYR Macedonia. They used a VAR (Vector Autoregression) approach with quarterly data from 2000 to 2012. There was no evidence of a negative correlation between women's empowerment and economic growth, as suggested by Okun's Law. Additionally, there was no indication of a causal relationship between women's empowerment and economic growth. Onwanchukwu (2015) conducted a study to analyse the influence of empowerment on output growth in Nigeria between 1985 and 2010. The study employed the ordinary least squares regression technique. The researcher's discoveries demonstrated that the empowerment of women has a substantial influence on the economic prosperity of Nigeria. However, it was shown that inflation had a considerable impact on Nigeria's output growth.

Kolawole et al (2015) analyse the correlation between poverty, inequality, and economic growth in Nigeria by utilizing time series data from 1980 to 2012. The statistical method of Ordinary Least Square (OLS) and the error correcting mechanism (ECM) were utilized. The data underwent unit root testing and cointegration testing using the Johansen technique. The variables studied were GDP growth rate, per capita income, literacy rate, government expenditure on education, and government expenditure on health. The report contends that in order to diminish poverty and inequality in Nigeria, it is imperative to enhance the gross domestic product and augment government expenditure on education and health facilities, while simultaneously implementing economic initiatives that prioritise the needs of the underprivileged.

Abdul-Khaliq, Soufan, & Shihab (2014) examined the correlation between economic growth and women's empowerment in Arab countries from 1994 to 2010 using the Pooled EGLS (Cross-section SUR) method. Research revealed a strong and statistically significant correlation between economic growth and the unemployment rate. Specifically, it was shown that a 1% rise in economic growth leads to a 0.16% decrease in the jobless rate. Awojobi

(2014) investigated the correlation between micro-credit facilities and the empowerment of women in Lagos state, Nigeria. The study utilized a quantitative methodology. His research findings demonstrated that women achieved higher earnings, enhanced home welfare, and an elevation in social and political standing due to their utilization of micro-credit services provided by both governmental and non-governmental organisations. The survey research conducted in several communities in the state has determined that the micro-credit scheme can empower women, provided that the activities of microfinance institutions are effectively regulated to prevent exploitation through high interest rates.

Ejikeme (2014) examined the correlation between unemployment and poverty among women in Nigeria. The study emphasizes that unemployment and poverty are widespread occurrences, affecting various segments of society rather than being limited to a certain group. The study unveiled a direct correlation between unemployment, poverty, and work difficulties in Nigeria. Akeju and Olanipekun (2014) confirmed the validity of Okun's law in Nigeria by employing the Error Correction Method and Johansen cointegration approach. The results indicated the presence of a significant association, both in the short term and in the long term, between the unemployment rate and empowerment in Nigeria. Therefore, it is necessary to implement fiscal policies and enhance the appeal of foreign direct investment (FDI) in order to mitigate the elevated unemployment rate in the nation.

Theoretical Framework

Empowerment Theory

In recent decades, a significant global discourse has developed around the correlation between youth empowerment and poverty reduction. Among the various frameworks that provide insight into this relationship, empowerment theory stands out as a compelling paradigm. Empowerment theory suggests that individuals and groups can attain a greater degree of autonomy, control over their lives, and the ability to effect change in their communities by gaining knowledge, skills, and confidence. Empowerment theory posits that individuals, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, must engage actively in fostering their own abilities and opportunities. According to Arnold and Pätzold (2014), empowerment involves both internal components (such as self-esteem and self-efficacy) and external factors (like resources and opportunities). This theory is instrumental in understanding how systematic barriers can inhibit growth and mobilize resistance among youth facing poverty. Moreover, it postulates that by providing young individuals with tools and environments conducive to empowerment, there will be a resultant increase in their capacity to influence their socio-economic realities.

Application of Empowerment theory using key Variables

Economic Agency

The first key variable relevant to both empowerment theory and poverty reduction is economic agency. Economic agency refers to the capacity of individuals, particularly youths, to make choices and take actions concerning their financial and economic well-being. Youth empowerment schemes often focus on skills development, vocational training, and entrepreneurship initiatives, all aimed at enhancing economic capabilities. For instance, the

Global Employment Policy (2014) outlines various youth employment programmes that have effectively linked training with job placements, highlighting the significant role of economic agency in reducing poverty levels. When youths feel empowered to pursue economic opportunities, they tend to seize them, leading to better job prospects and income stability. A study by the International Labour Organization (2014) underscores the potential of youth employment initiatives in transforming economies; in countries such as Kenya and Ghana, government-sponsored vocational training schemes have dramatically decreased unemployment rates among young people. The correlation between enhanced economic agency and poverty reduction is evident, and empowerment theory serves as a guiding framework for designing impactful youth initiatives.

Social Capital

Another crucial variable in the analysis of empowerment theory within youth empowerment and poverty reduction is social capital. Social capital refers to the networks, relationships, and norms that enable collective action and facilitate cooperation for mutual benefit. Empowerment theory recognizes that youth who are socially empowered can leverage their social networks for economic gain, emotional support, and community resilience. Schemes that cultivate social capital among youth not only foster peer connections but also encourage active community engagement. For instance, a collaborative project initiated by the Youth Employment Fund in the UK successfully incorporated mentorship components into its programme, thereby enhancing social capital among participants (Youth Employment UK, 2018). The relationship between social capital and poverty reduction becomes clear when one considers how young individuals, empowered through collaborative networks, can share resources, information, and opportunities. Research conducted by Putnam (2000) has consistently demonstrated that community engagement directly correlates with lower poverty levels, as socially cohesive groups are better positioned to negotiate for their rights and advocate for governmental support.

Psychological Resilience

Psychological resilience, the ability to adapt to stress and adversity while maintaining mental well-being, forms the third key variable in our examination of empowerment theory in the context of youth schemes and poverty reduction. Empowerment initiatives that incorporate elements of emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, and resilience training equip individuals with the psychological tools necessary to navigate challenges. The effectiveness of such programmes can be witnessed in initiatives focusing on mental health support and coping mechanisms. In a study by Young Minds (2019), it was revealed that youth engagement in structured empowerment activities significantly improved resilience scores amongst at-risk populations. This, in turn, contributed to a marked decrease in drop-out rates in schools, enhancing the likelihood of educational attainment, which is a critical determinant of socio-economic status. The link between psychological resilience and poverty reduction underscores the multifaceted nature of empowerment. Simply providing economic or social opportunities is insufficient; efforts must extend to ensuring youth are mentally equipped to take advantage of these opportunities. Empowerment theory provides the theoretical foundation for integrating psychological resilience into youth programmes, reinforcing the notion that poverty alleviation is an inherently multifaceted challenge.

To support the arguments made regarding the relevance of empowerment theory in the study of youth empowerment schemes and poverty reduction, it is vital to draw on empirical evidence. Research from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) illustrates how youth empowerment participation in decision-making correlates with sustainable development goals, including poverty eradication (UNDP, 2014). Furthermore, accounts from the World Bank indicate that youth-led initiatives targeting unemployment have had measurable impacts on poverty levels in Sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank, 2016). Moreover, local evidence from various initiatives, such as the Global Youth Empowerment Programme in India, has demonstrated that enhanced youth agency leads to increased community investment and lower dependency on social welfare. Participants reported increased personal responsibility, leading to direct contributions to their local economies (Youth in India, 2022). Finally, the longitudinal evaluation of youth development programmes in Brazil shows that those who engaged in empowerment initiatives had a lower likelihood of experiencing relative poverty as they transitioned into adulthood (Abramo & Ribeiro, 2017). This is further compounded by evidence linking psychological resilience gained through empowerment training to improved economic outcomes later in life (Holmes, 2019).

Gap-in-Literature

The review above presents the perspectives of relevant existing literature that discussed the significance of youth empowerment programmes in relation to reducing poverty and enhancing the quality of life for young people and those living in rural areas. The study analysed the perspectives of scholars such as Nnadi et al (2012), Ohize and Adamu (2009), Emeh (2012), Ofem and Ajayi (2008), Kolade et al. (2014), Okwoche, Age and Alegwu (2012), Olujide (2008), Agwu, Anyanwu, Uduogu and Akinagbe (2008), Ike (2012) and Anger (2010) among others who examined the relationship between youth empowerment and the improvement of living standards for rural dwellers/youth. They employed various methodological approaches and arrived at findings that support the continuation of empowerment programmes. However, the text failed to establish the connection between the empowerment programme and the reduction of poverty in individuals. It also did not explain how empowering young people lead to a decrease in poverty among the beneficiaries. Additionally, it did not address the difficulties that hinder the program's efficiency and effectiveness. Moreover, none of the studies were conducted in Anyigba, Ajaokuta, Oguma/Bassa Nge, to assess the extent to which the empowerment initiative contributes to poverty reduction in the specific area being examined. Additionally, several researches have become outdated due to the implementation of new governmental regulations. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct a study that examines or evaluates the impact of youth empowerment programmes on poverty reduction in Anyigba, Ajaokuta, Oguma/Bassa Nge, in Kogi State, Nigeria, employing both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Method

Descriptive survey was utilized to collect the essential information to achieve the study's objectives concerning the current status of the study's topic. The study was conducted at three different communities within Kogi State, Nigeria, namely Anyigba, Ajaokuta, Oguma/Bassa Nge and the rationale was due to the fact that these community has remained underdeveloped

inspire of the presence of corporate organization in like the banking sector in the study areas which constitute the economic hub of the state. The use of the multi-stage sampling technique was deemed more suitable for the goal of acquiring information that could be generalized to a larger population during the course of this research. A multi-stage sampling process was implemented in a sequential manner. The study used a three-stage random sampling methodology (Usman, et.al, 2023). In the initial stage, a random sample or selection process is employed to choose two council wards from the Dekina, Bassa, and Ajaokuta Local Government Areas (LGA), resulting in a total of six units of research. In the second stage, a total of twelve (12) communities are selected using a random process. This selection includes two communities from each of the six (6) target regions previously identified. In stage three of the research process, a total of 372 respondents from 329,456 residents of the three communities were selected for the study by sampling 31 individuals from each unit using purposive sampling to generate information from residents who have been around for a period of two decades to have witnessed various projects of the banks. To ensure the validity of the research instrument(s), a pilot survey and pretest were conducted before the main survey to ensure the reliability of the research instrument. Sixty individuals who were not part of the main sample were given the instrument to complete as part of the pilot study. The Cronbach's alpha formula was applied to assess the reliability of the instrument, and the final value for the instrument's Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was 0.86. The data acquired from the field survey was analysed using mean descriptive statistics; specifically, mean score analysis (graphs) After duration of three weeks following the distribution of the questionnaire, a total of 365 questionnaires were deemed suitable for study as adopted from Usman, et.al, (2023).

Result and Discussion of Findings

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N=365)

Sex	Frequency	Percent	Occupation	Frequency	Percent
Male	208	57	Farmer	86	23.
Female	157	43	Civil Servant	64	17
			Trader/Farmer/Heir dresser, Keke Rider,	139	40
			Okada, Carpentry Driver/Mechanic	76	20
Age Range	Frequency	Percent	Religion	Frequency	Percent
18-25	184	51	Christian	166	46
26-33	98	26.5	Islam	187	51
34-41	32	8.5	African	12	3
42-49	34	9			
50+	17	5			
Marital Status	Frequency	Percent	Educational Qualification	Frequency	Percent
Single	201	55	No formal Education	44	12
Married	117	33	Primary Education	132	36
Divorced	41	11	Secondary	123	34
Widowed	5	1	Tertiary-NCE/Diploma	65	18
Separated	1	0	Degree		

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Socio-demographics Attributes of the respondents

Table 1 presents the data collected from 365 participants, indicating that 208 individuals (57%) were male, whereas 158 individuals (43%) were female. The outcome of the distribution is due to the proportional allocation of programme recipients among the families included in the study. The table shows that the majority of respondents, 185 (51%), were between the ages of 18-25. Additionally, 98 (26.6%) were into the age range of 26-33, 8.5 (8.5%) were aged 34-41, 9 (9%) were aged 42-49, and 17 (5%) were 50 years and beyond, which was the smallest group. This indicates that the majority of study participants fell between the age brackets of 18-33 years, as these groups constituted a larger portion of the target population. The age composition of the study area indicates that the youth were the primary beneficiaries of the poverty alleviation programme. The programme focused on empowering the youth by providing them with keke NAPEP and motorcycles, which served as a means of employment for the majority.

The study participants' marital status was as follows: the majority, 202 (55%), were single; 117 (32%) were married; 41 (11%) were divorced; 5 (3%) were widows/widowers; and just one respondent was separated from their spouse. The chart indicates that the majority, specifically 187 individuals (51%), identified as Muslims. Additionally, 166 respondents (46%) who participated in this study were Christians, while 12 individuals (3%) followed traditional African religion. Moreover, an examination of the occupational status of the participants revealed that the majority, 139 individuals (40%), were engaged in trading and farming. Additionally, 87 individuals (23%) were just farmers, 76 individuals (20%) were drivers/mechanics, and 64 individuals (17%) were civil servants. Upon examining the educational qualifications, table 4.1 indicates that 44 individuals (12%) did not have any formal education, 132 individuals (36%) had completed primary education, 123 individuals (34%) had completed secondary education, and 65 individuals (18%) had obtained tertiary educational qualifications. This indicates that a significant number of the participants possessed the necessary literacy skills to comprehend and value the advantages that can be obtained from any poverty reduction initiative.

Youth Empowerment Scheme on Poverty Alleviation in Study areas

According to conversations with LGA council leaders, the following youth empowerment programmes were implemented in various LGA council wards between 2013 and 2024. The Kogi Economic Empowerment Programme (GEEP), the Social Intervention Programme (SIP), the Youth Employment and Social Support Operation (YESSO), the Micro-Credit Plan, the Garri Processing Machines, N-Power, the Commercial Motorcycles (Okada), and Keke NAPEP are all examples of such schemes that have been implemented in Kogi State. Since the results show that eight youth empowerment programmes were implemented during the study period, they contradict the first research presumption that no such programmes existed in the study area with the aim of reducing poverty.

Assessment of the Schemes

The awareness, accessibility, rating, and direct impact variables were used to evaluate the poverty alleviation programme.

Awareness

Among the 365 respondents surveyed, 163 individuals (44.66%) reported being aware of a poverty alleviation initiative in the local government area, while the majority of 202 individuals (55.34%) stated that they were not aware of any poverty alleviation programme. The lack of knowledge exhibited indicates a failure in effectively mobilizing the people. Additional dialogue with local government officials unveiled that from 2013 to 2017, a total of 15,000 graduates were employed as teachers in different secondary schools through the N-power programme. Furthermore, 8,000 young individuals from various council wards were recipients of KEKE Napep, and an additional 12,000 youths were provided with motorcycles for commercial use. Each of the five women's garri processing cooperatives had one garri processing machine. In addition, young individuals have been provided with different amounts of money, ranging from #20,000 to #50,000, through the crediting plan, youth employment and social support operation (YESSO), or social intervention activities. The purpose of distributing the cash is to help aspiring businesses and skilled craftsmen. Furthermore, the Kogi Economic Empowerment Programme (GEEP) has provided benefits to 7,000 market women and artisans. Out of the 163 programmers surveyed, 73 reported receiving information from their traditional rulers, while 90 stated that they obtained the information from their previous colleagues and politicians. These individuals are former civil servants who continue to retain connections with the current authorities in the local government and civil service.

Accessibility

On the accessibility, most of the people who answered that they knew about poverty-relief programmes said that they had used one type of scheme or another and found it helpful. For instance, 71 of the 163 graduates said they had gotten motorcycles, 23 said they had gotten KEKE Napep, and 35 said they were teaching through the N-power scheme. Three groups of women who work together to process garri said they had each gotten a garri processing machine. Twenty-one young entrepreneurs and artisans said they had received different amounts of money from YESSO, SIP, or GEEP. In the interviews, people who had used the plan said that to get the most out of the NAPEP programme, you had to be a member of the ruling party. You had to be a member of the ruling party to get access to the local government administrators, ward chairman, youth leaders, women leaders, and council appointees. The plan was strictly based on party membership. Imams, Pastors, and other traditional leaders also help people who live in rural areas because they are loyal to the party. (Source: people interviewed in 2024).

Rating

Regarding ratings, all respondents who benefited from motorcycles, KEKE Napep, stated that the motorcycles and tricycles were brand new and in good functioning order. Those who were hired through N-power claimed the scheme is helpful for graduates and the salary is consistent and reasonable. All of the young entrepreneurs and artisans who got varied amounts of money from various schemes believed the support was beneficial. Only three women's garri processing cooperatives reported that the machines they received were refurbished rather than new.

Relationship Between Youth Empowerment Programme and Poverty Reduction

Furthermore, according to the interview:

"The programmes have considerably benefitted us; some of us have Keke napep, which we use for commercial purposes in order to employ ourselves and provide food on the table for our families; without the empowerment programme, where would we be today? I have a motorbike that I use for Okada, which earns me money to support my family. Some of our wives' garri production has increased as a result of the garri processing machine that they were given. Our young are no longer idle; they are now engaged through N-power Teach and N-power Agro. To some extent, the programme reduced poverty in the study region, created jobs, and empowered adolescents and women. However, the programme had a significant negative influence on educational empowerment. However, the roads are quite terrible, which usually affects the longevity of this motorbike and keke napep, and when there are bad roads for transportation, it impacts sales of production and transportation to market, such as moving the created garri to the market." (Source: Interview respondents, 2024). These data imply that the Youth Empowerment Programme helped the research region under consideration but failed in terms of schooling. The table below shows how the Youth Empowerment Programme has benefitted Kogi State beneficiaries in the following ways:

The Skills Acquisition Strategies programme by Youth empowerment programme in the study area

Table 2: Respondents view on the skills Acquisition Training Programme by Youth empowerment programme

Tailoring, barbing, and soap marking		Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes		342	94
No		23	6
Total		365	100.0
Loan Distributions to Farmers Facilities and Welding			
Yes		365	100
No		-	0%
Total		365	100.0
Carpentry, auto-mechanic and vulcanizing			
Yes		222	61
No		143	39
Total		365	100.0
Hair and business initiatives			
Yes		365	100
No		-	0%
Total		365	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 2 displays the areas in which the Youth Empowerment project has made a significant influence on the beneficiaries of the project. The respondents asserted that they were

cognizant of and have derived advantages from the diverse acquired skills undertaken by the Youth Empowerment Programme. The majority of the respondents, specifically 342 individuals representing 94% of the total respondents, confirmed their awareness of skills acquisition training in tailoring, barbing, and soap making. Additionally, all 365 respondents (100%) reported benefiting from training in loan distribution to farmers facilities and welding. Moreover, 222 respondents (61%) acknowledged benefiting from training in carpentry, auto-mechanic, and vulcanizing. Lastly, all 365 respondents (100%) stated that they had also benefited from training in hair salon and business initiatives. This indicates that a majority of the respondents acknowledged their awareness of the skills acquisition initiatives implemented by the Youth Empowerment Programme. Furthermore, they reported benefiting from several aspects of the programme.

Based on the conducted interview, all respondents stated that the Youth empowerment initiative has aided in multiple ways in these areas. For instance, the migration of young people to urban areas has significantly decreased due to skill acquisition programmes such as learning welding, hairdressing, and carpentry. Additionally, many young individuals have ventured into agricultural businesses, specifically cashew farming, cassava farming, and yam farming, as a result of the opportunities provided to them. Another respondent argues that the provision of KEKE NAPEP and commercial motorcycles has enabled our young people to become self-employed. Additionally, the micro credit loan provided to support young entrepreneurs has played a role in reducing poverty and unemployment in Kogi State.

Another respondent states that the youth empowerment programme in this Local Government Area (LGA) has been beneficial due to President Buhari's Social Investment Scheme. For instance, our young individuals are now employed through N-POWER, and we can confidently assert that approximately 500 of our graduated youths have secured employment through N-POWER. Additionally, around 10,000 market women have received cash transfers for their businesses. Indeed, a number of us were provided with generators, grinding machines, motorcycles, and soft loans. Additionally, a well was allocated to a community to ensure access to potable water. The Youth empowerment campaign has successfully improved the living standard and reduced the poverty level in the study area. An interview was done with the official in charge of the Youth Empowerment Programme to discuss the programmes' success. He stated that the Programme was a resounding success, notwithstanding the hurdles encountered throughout the implementation stages in the area. A follow-up interview was done with the local government desk officer to discuss the achievements of the Youth Empowerment Programme. He stated that the programme was successful. However, the government must provide additional assistance to the people in addressing the issue of poverty in the region, as a significant number of them remain dissatisfied with their current living conditions. The community leader was asked about the success of the Youth Empowerment Programme. He stated that the programme was performed well, but the bulk of the people did not receive appropriate amenities.

In regards to the obstacles, a participant was requested to propose strategies to tackle the issues hindering the execution of the Youth empowerment initiative. His response was that

governments should make significant efforts to mitigate the prevalent poverty levels in the country. Governments should establish a monitoring body to oversee the implementation of the poverty alleviation project (Youth empowerment programme). The programme officials must establish a robust accountability structure to effectively manage and report on the allocated funds. A different participant was also requested to provide an equal number of suggestions for resolving the difficulties. He stated that the Youth empowerment initiative should include a comprehensive database where accurate information regarding the impoverished individuals can be recorded. The Youth empowerment plan should prevent the top politicians in the state from politicizing and taking control of their various forms of assistance.

The poverty alleviation programme should be autonomous. In a similar vein, another participant was queried about the identical matter. His response was as follows: In order to effectively reduce poverty in Nigeria, it is crucial for the agency to possess comprehensive knowledge not only of the number of impoverished families or households, but also the specific characteristics of their poverty. This information will enable the development of suitable strategies to eradicate poverty.

Adequate financing should be allocated, together with effective monitoring to oversee the disbursement of the funds. The active participation of individuals experiencing genuine poverty should be sought in the formulation and execution of policies aimed at mitigating the issue of poverty, as it has significantly hindered the effectiveness of the Youth Empowerment Programme.

The aforementioned findings of the study challenge the second research proposition that there is no correlation between Youth empowerment programmes and poverty reduction. The results from various skill acquisition programmes and interviews with respondents indicate that many youths have acquired different skills and some have been empowered with keke napep and commercial motorcycles for employment. This demonstrates the potential of engaging the large number of youth and reducing poverty levels in the study area.

Impact of Youth Empowerment Programme on Poverty Reduction in Kogi State Improvement in the Standard of Living

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents According to the Improvement of Standard of Living

Improving the standard of living of the people in local government	Frequency	Percentage
Not Improved	39	11
Improved.	326	89
Total	365	100.

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The table above indicates that among the 365 respondents, 39 (11%) believe that youth empowerment programmes have no positive impact on the standard of living of young people in the local government, while 326 (89%) believe that such programmes have indeed improved their standard of living.

Table 4: Effectiveness of youth empowerment scheme in reducing the level of Poverty in the study area

Variable	Frequency	Total (%)
Strongly Agreed	20	5.4
Agreed	22	6
Disagreed	133	36.4
Strongly Disagreed	190	52.2
Total	365	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 4 demonstrates that while 6% of respondents agreed, the majority of respondents (52.2%) strongly disagreed that the study area's youth empowerment programme had a significant impact on lowering the rate of poverty. These results indicate that the programme has not been successful in lowering the study area's poverty rate. Investigating whether or not youth empowerment programmes contribute to the reduction of poverty in the study area, it was found that 21% of study participants strongly agree that these programmes reduce poverty if they are directed towards the affected, 70% agree that these programmes do so, 2% strongly disagree, 2% do not agree, and 5% were unsure.

Table 5: Capacity of Youth Empowerment scheme in Poverty Reduction

Variable	Frequency	Total (%)
Yes	77	21
No	288	79

Source: Field Survey, 2024

As noted by the majority of 288 (79%) respondents, the data in table 4 above show that the Youth Empowerment plan in the research region was unable to significantly reduce youth poverty because the rate of poverty has not decreased. In contrast, one of the young responders to the interview on the youth empowerment program's role in reducing poverty claims that: "In reality, the programme has given trainings and credit facilities to several youths in the state which impacted positively on their income levels." Tailoring, soap making, hair styling, photography, and ICT training are among the skills taught. Following the training, they received financing to start their enterprises. In doing so, youth empowerment programmes have had a significant positive influence on youth wellbeing, but the percentage of recipients living in poverty has not decreased. (Interview with respondents, 2024).

Although the youth empowerment programme in the study area has not decreased poverty, another respondent to an interview from the Anyigba council ward concurs that it has boosted economic development in the following ways: "By giving beneficiaries access to counselling services and vocational training, the programme has helped them become more economically independent and self-sufficient. This has altered their perspective on how to contribute to their communities and the nation as a whole. People who might have turned to prostitution due to poverty now own businesses that bring in money. Now there are mechanic businesses, barbershops, and carpentry stores run by people who would have been armed robbers. Youth empowerment programmes, in my opinion, have helped with economic development and given some young people jobs, but the rate of poverty is still very high. The results of this study refute the previous research's assertion that youth empowerment programmes have no discernible effect on the reduction of poverty in the study area. Instead, the results highlight the benefits that youth empowerment programmes have brought about, such as the engagement and self-employment of many young people, the education of women who would have otherwise turned to prostitution, and the acquisition of a skill for sustainability among young people engaging in deviant behaviour or criminal activity.

Challenges Facing Youth Empowerment Scheme

From talking to people in the Dekina/Ajaokuta local government, we learned that the Youth Empowerment Programme has some problems that make it harder to provide services. For instance: "The youths who are supposed to benefit from the programmes aren't really the ones who do. Politicians usually take the money and materials meant for the programme and use them for other things, like enrolling family members who work for the government or are doing something worthwhile." People who get loans usually don't pay them back, and the government doesn't give enough money to the scheme. All of these problems make it harder for the scheme to work as a whole people who were interviewed in 2024. As a result, one LG official said, "By starting the youth empowerment scheme, the government has good intentions." For at least a short time, the different programmes kept a lot of young people interested and involved. Also, some young people were able to get something to help them keep taking care of themselves from there. But there are problems with the plan. There are a lot of problems with the scheme, such as not being sincere about putting it into action, facilities being misused to take money away from the scheme, some recipients not being fully committed, and policymakers not being consistent when they make decisions about the scheme. All in all, it's a good move by the government.

Discussion of Findings

The research was conducted in Ajaokuta, Anyigba, and Oguma/Bassange in Kogi State, with a predominant number of male and unmarried participants. The study indicates that youth empowerment strategies have been implemented in the research region to alleviate poverty. The findings indicate that youth empowerment projects, such as providing motorcycles, tricycles, and grinding machines to women, as well as offering soft loans to enhance businesses, have had some positive impact. However, it is important to note that these measures alone are not sufficient to significantly reduce poverty in the study area. However, the targeted demographic (youths) for the programme is not directly impacted as the

programmes were not specifically designed for them. Although a significant proportion of adults also participated in the programme. The target demographic has not derived any advantages from the many initiatives, and there have been documented expressions of discontent with the Youth Empowerment Programme. The poverty level in the research area was generally considered to be at an average level. The programmes were assessed to suffer from inadequate policy formulation, execution, coordination, and monitoring. Considering the current socio-economic situation in the country, it is widely acknowledged that the country is facing widespread poverty. As noted by Yahaya (2006), youth empowerment programmes have a broader impact than just reducing poverty, as they also play a role in supporting the educational aspirations of numerous young people.

Consequently, the young individuals had the favourable circumstances to cultivate their skills, enhance their self-worth, and ultimately become valuable and well-regarded contributors to society. This study aimed to determine the number of individuals who have benefited from the youth/adult empowerment programme. Our findings revealed that 75% of the respondents have really profited from the youth empowerment project. The training programme was designed with the expectation that the recipients will establish their own businesses based on the skills they have gained. Nevertheless, the interventions lack the capability to alleviate poverty in the studied region. The research also aimed to determine whether the actions of the Youth empowerment initiative enhance economic development. It was shown that 97% of the 350 respondents agreed that it significantly enhances economic development. This statement was in accordance with the findings of the National Committee on Monitoring of Poverty Alleviation Programme in Nigeria, reported by Obadan (2001). The monitoring committee has reported that the youth empowerment initiative is a highly successful project that has effectively empowered thousands of disillusioned young individuals. After examining the operations of the Youth Empowerment project, it is crucial to consider the challenges faced by the project. According to the data, 92% of the respondents, which amounts to 337 individuals, are knowledgeable about the difficulties encountered by the Youth empowerment programme during the execution of its initiatives. The issues encountered by this plan include programmatic inconsistency, inadequate implementation, corruption among government officials and public servants, ineffective targeting methods, and a lack of direct attention on impoverished individuals (Ogwumike, 2012).

The poll also revealed that while the Youth empowerment programme temporarily enhanced the level of life, it did not contribute to poverty reduction in Kogi State. The poll revealed that poverty alleviation agencies are hindered in their service delivery by the challenges they face, as confirmed by Kogi State officials and the majority of the respondents. Furthermore, another issue of the Youth empowerment plan is the dissemination of false propaganda regarding its implementation. The political elite appropriate the programmes and finances intended for them, and thereafter broadcasts a narrative of the program's success. Due to inadequate oversight and monitoring, the fraudulent information remains undetected until the entire programme collapses.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the correlation between youth empowerment schemes and poverty reduction in Kogi State is evident. By equipping young people with skills, providing employment opportunities, fostering entrepreneurship, engaging them in community development, and ultimately promoting long-term economic growth, these schemes can significantly alleviate poverty in the region. However, challenges remain, and concerted efforts are required to address these obstacles. By increasing funding, ensuring alignment with the labour market, raising awareness, and improving accessibility, Kogi State can maximize the impacts of youth empowerment schemes. As the nation looks towards sustainable development, investing in its youth is not just an option it is an imperative. Furthermore, empowerment theory is an indispensable framework for understanding the complex interplay between youth empowerment schemes and poverty reduction. The variables of economic agency, social capital, and psychological resilience are integral to this relationship. Through empowerment initiatives, young people are not only provided with the skills necessary for economic participation but are also supported in forging strong social networks and developing mental resilience. Empirical evidence suggests that youth empowerment fundamentally alters the socio-economic landscape, leading to tangible outcomes in poverty reduction. As such, it is essential for policymakers and programme designers to integrate empowerment theory into their frameworks, ensuring that youth empowerment schemes are holistic and multifaceted. Only through such comprehensive strategies can we hope to address the entrenched cycles of poverty that continue to affect vulnerable populations globally.

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