

# **Exploring the Impact of NGO Youth Empowerment Programs** on the Socio-Economic Development of Rural Communities in Nigeria



November 2024

# PREFACE

On behalf of the Board and Management of Aspire Coronation Trust (ACT) Foundation, I am honored to present this report, which explores the profound impact of NGO youth empowerment programs on the socio-economic development of rural communities in Nigeria. This study represents a significant step in our ongoing commitment to fostering sustainable development and empowering young people as key agents of change.

This report serves as a crucial resource for NGOs, policymakers, and stakeholders dedicated to enhancing youth empowerment efforts. By synthesizing evidence from various programs and drawing on case studies from across Nigeria, we aim to provide actionable insights that can inform future initiatives. Our goal is to bridge the gap between theoretical frameworks and practical applications, enabling organizations to design programs that yield meaningful socio-economic benefits for rural communities.

In recent years, the importance of youth engagement in development initiatives has gained increasing recognition. Young people are not only the leaders of tomorrow but also vital contributors to the socio-economic fabric of their communities today. However, many rural areas in Nigeria continue to face challenges such as limited access to education, employment opportunities, and essential resources. This report seeks to shed light on how targeted empowerment programs can address these challenges and foster resilience among youth.

NGOs play a pivotal role in implementing youth empowerment initiatives, leveraging their deep understanding of community dynamics and needs. By focusing on skills development, entrepreneurship, and leadership training, these organizations can create pathways for young individuals to thrive. Yet, despite their potential, many NGOs encounter obstacles that limit their capacity to deliver impactful programs effectively.

We believe that empowering youth is not just about providing opportunities; it is about fostering an inclusive environment where young voices are heard and valued. By investing in the potential of young people, we can catalyse broader socio-economic development that benefits entire communities.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the ACT Foundation Research Team for their dedication and hard work in bringing this report to fruition. I also wish to thank our independent reviewers and grantee partners for their invaluable contributions and support throughout this process.

I invite you to explore the insights and recommendations presented in this report. Together, we can harness the transformative power of youth empowerment programs to create a more equitable and prosperous future for rural communities in Nigeria.

Thank you.



*Osayi Alile*

Chief Executive Officer,  
ACT Foundation

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENT

In embarking on this significant research journey, we express our heartfelt gratitude to those instrumental in bringing our vision to fruition. We especially acknowledge CEO Osayi Alile and the dedicated members of the ACT Foundation Board. Their unwavering support and approval of our research topic provided essential resources and inspired us to explore the impacts of NGO youth empowerment programs on rural communities in Nigeria.

We extend our appreciation to the review team, Ugochukwu Nwosu and Samuel Igah, whose expertise was invaluable. Ugochukwu's guidance and Samuel's leadership were crucial in navigating our research complexities, enhancing the quality of our findings.

A special acknowledgment goes to Peter Onyenemerem, who led the research with diligence and authored the comprehensive report. His commitment to excellence ensured that our findings are robust and meaningful.

We also thank the ACT Research Team and the entire ACT Foundation Team for their collaborative spirit, which was vital in shaping our research outcomes. Each member's contributions fostered an environment of creativity and innovation.

Our gratitude extends to Franca Adinya and Omoye Oriaghan for their invaluable input during the internal review process, which refined our work. We appreciate Abiodun Owo for her exceptional assistance in coordinating interviews, crucial for gathering qualitative data.

Moreover, we recognize our grantee organizations—Africa Business Radio, Aspilos Charity and Development Foundation, and Junior Achievement Nigeria. Their participation enriched our research and highlighted their commitment to empowering youth within their communities. The insights shared by their beneficiaries deepened our understanding of NGO initiatives' real-world impacts. Reflecting on this journey, we acknowledge it as a collective effort fueled by passion and dedication. The collaboration among all parties has produced a valuable research report and strengthened our resolve to advocate for youth empowerment in Nigeria. Thank you all for your unwavering support in this important work.

# List of Acronyms

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FGN	Federal Government of Nigeria
KII	Key Informant Interview
INGO	International non-governmental organizations
NBS	National Bureau of Statistics
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NNNGO	Nigeria Network of NGOs

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# Abstract

This study examines the impact of youth empowerment programs on the socio-economic development of rural communities in Nigeria. NGOs have become increasingly important in promoting socio-economic growth in developing countries like Nigeria, where rural areas face significant challenges such as poverty, unemployment, and limited access to education. Aspire Coronation Trust Foundation has emerged as a pivotal player, funding initiatives that target the specific needs of rural youth, aiming to enhance their skills, promote entrepreneurship, and foster community development. Investigating the interventions funded by ACT Foundation in Nigeria, the research highlights the catalytic role that youth empowerment programs can play in the growth of rural communities.

Employing a qualitative research approach, the study sought to identify NGOs involved, assess the effectiveness of their programs, examine the challenges they face in rural areas, and suggest strategies for improvement. Findings revealed that NGO-led youth empowerment programs significantly enhance the economic prospects of rural youth through skills development, vocational training, and entrepreneurship opportunities. Participants noted improvements in self-efficacy and increased community engagement, which contributed to better socio-economic conditions.

It highlights several challenges faced by NGOs, including financial constraints that limit project scope and sustainability, logistical difficulties that hinder effective program delivery, scepticism among beneficiaries about the initiatives' effectiveness, and a digital divide restricting access to essential resources. These challenges underscore the complexities associated with executing interventions in rural African communities, contextualizing the need for NGOs to adopt sustainable operational practices. Collaborating with local stakeholders is crucial for maximizing the impact of youth empowerment initiatives. By engaging with community leaders and local governments, NGOs can better align their programs with the needs and priorities of the communities they serve.

In conclusion, this study suggests that youth empowerment initiatives have significantly contributed to the socio-economic development of Nigerian communities. Their impact can be further amplified through improved funding opportunities for NGOs, enhanced delivery frameworks, fostering trust among beneficiaries, and addressing the digital divide with initiatives that increase technology access for young people. By implementing these strategies, NGOs can greatly enhance their effectiveness in promoting youth empowerment and community development.





An aerial photograph of a village with a large orange shape on the left. The village features a mix of traditional stone buildings and modern structures, surrounded by green fields and a forested hill in the background. The orange shape is a large, rounded rectangle that covers the left side of the image.

**1.0**

# **Introduction**



# Introduction

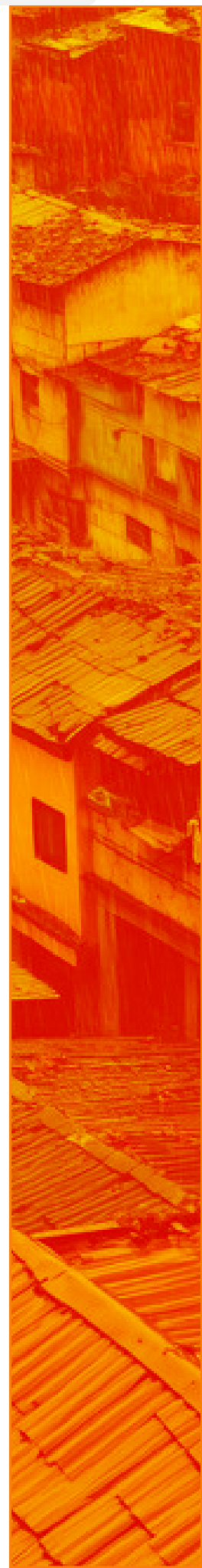
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The value of a country is known not for its riches or assets but by its people's quality.

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and serves as a significant economic center globally, with an estimated population exceeding 223.8 million in 2023 (Worldometer report 2024). Over 65% of the country's population is under the age of 35, with 35% of the population between 15 and 30 (Population Reference Bureau-PRB report, 2018). This group of people constitutes the active working population in Nigeria (Omobowale, Oyelade, Omobowale & Falase, 2020). As observed by Imhonopi and Urim (2018), Nigeria is one of the central African countries with a large youth population. However, rather than utilizing the potential of these vast human resources, Nigerian youths face numerous challenges ranging from unemployment to poverty and social exclusion (Osabuohien, Efobi, Gitau, Osabohien, & Adediran, 2020). As the Africa Development Bank-AFDB (2016) averred, most African youths lack stable economic opportunities. Out of the 420 million African youths aged 15-35, one-third are unemployed and discouraged, another one third are vulnerable or underemployed, and only one in six is in wage employment.

The above scenario is also reflected in the Nigerian situation, where the unemployment rate has increased rapidly. By the end of the third quarter of 2023, unemployment and underemployment in Nigeria was put at 26.9%, with the youths forming the more significant part of this percentage (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). From the NBS report, the unemployment rate for Nigerian youths within the third quarter of 2023 alone stood at 33.1 per cent for those aged 15 to 24 and 20.2 percent for those aged 25 to 34 (Ojoye, 2023), showing how disreputable youth unemployment in Nigeria had become. This presents a paradox of suffering amid plenty, considering the vast human and material resources that the country is endowed with. (Apata, Apata, Igbalajobi & Awoniyi, 2010). This situation depicts a gross underutilization of the available human and natural resources, primarily responsible for the nations' underdeveloped status.

The value of a country is known not for its riches or assets but by its people's quality. Thus, a country's true value lies in the capabilities, aspirations, and potential of its citizens, particularly its youth. While abundant resources can provide a temporary advantage, it is the human capital that ultimately drives sustainable development, innovation, and social progress. The youths have been described as Africa's greatest



asset. If properly harnessed, this resourceful working-age population could support increased productivity and more robust inclusive economic growth across the continent (AFDB, 2016). Most prominent cities globally have their socio-economic and political life driven by human personnel.

For instance, industrialized nations such as China, Japan, and several other Asian countries are propelled by their youth population, particularly those equipped with the essential skills to excel when provided with a conducive environment. These societies have witnessed tremendous progress within a specific timeframe. However, the scenario is different in many developing nations, including Nigeria, where the youths in the urban centers are faced with unemployment, homelessness, economic hardship, slum life, and other socio-economic problems mainly due to poor planning and lack of effective youth-development policies (Obi-Ani & Isiani, 2020; Okeke, Eziyi, Udeh, & Ezema, 2020).

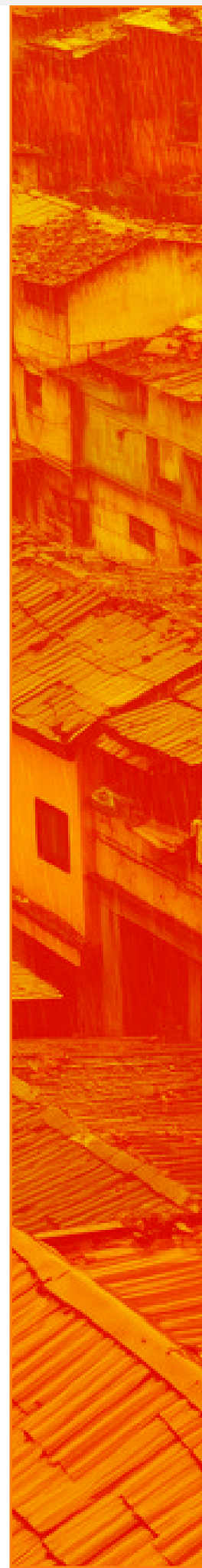
In the last decade, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have become increasingly important and one of the key stakeholders that foster youth economic empowerment, in all their fundamental areas of work such as humanitarian relief, long-term development, and policy formation (Perrot, Duchamp, & Chabbert, 2015)

Globally, international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) have adapted their approaches to address socioeconomic issues based on the specific needs and characteristics of each challenge. These organizations, primarily focused on humanitarian efforts to assist crisis victims, the impoverished, and underserved communities. Their initiatives complement governmental efforts to alleviate the suffering of marginalized and vulnerable populations (Díaz & Pillai, 2002; Petkoski & Twose, 2003).

The purpose of youth empowerment is threefold: to build their capacity to realize their aspirations and boost their self-motivation and awareness, facilitate youth to forge partnerships with other groups in the society and instil a sense of ownership in the efforts to improve their wellbeing (GoK, 2006).

In Nigeria, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have emerged as crucial players in promoting youth economic empowerment, playing a pivotal role in key areas of development aimed at alleviating poverty, generating employment opportunities, and fostering income generation among young people. It is against this backdrop that the present study aims to evaluate the impacts of NGO-led youth empowerment initiatives on the socioeconomic advancement of rural communities in Nigeria..

According to National Bureau of Statistics Report (2013), successive Nigerian governments, non-governmental bodies, and international organizations have recognized the importance of youths in nation-building and have initiated several youth empowerment/poverty alleviation programmes. However, the impact of many of these programmes has left much to be desired, as many of such programmes have remained inconclusive (Holt & Neely, 2011; Ogunmefun & Okuneye, 2020). Against this backdrop, this study seeks to explore the Impacts of NGO youth empowerment program on the socio-economic development of rural communities.





## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Nigeria have implemented various youth empowerment programs aimed at enhancing the socio-economic well-being of rural communities. These initiatives seek to address the challenges of unemployment, poverty, and social exclusion faced by Nigerian youths. For Instance, the Aspire Coronation Trust (ACT) Foundation as a grant making non-profit entity has funded over 95 local, national and regional non - profit organizations working to address challenges and associated vulnerabilities across the African Continent.

Despite the implementation of various youth empowerment programs by NGOs in Nigeria aimed at enhancing the socio-economic well-being of rural communities, there is limited evidence on the actual impact of these initiatives. While awareness of empowerment programs is high (74.6%), only a small percentage (17.2%) of youths have directly benefited (Olawale, Olonade, George, Mathew & Adamu, 2022). Among beneficiaries, less than half (41.2%) are engaged in activities related to their previous empowerment training. The majority of youths (61.6%) consider these programs valuable and resourceful, indicating a need to improve reach and alignment with employment.

To enhance the impact of NGO youth empowerment initiatives on the socio-economic progress of rural areas in Nigeria, it is critical to assess the current challenges and identify opportunities for improvement. This study underscores the need for an exploratory investigation into the interventions and challenges encountered by NGOs in implementing youth empowerment initiatives in Nigeria. By examining these factors, the research primarily aimed to provide insights into the effectiveness of NGO efforts and their contributions to the overall success of youth-focused projects. In addition, this will also provide evidence-based recommendations to strengthen the design and implementation of these programs for greater reach and sustainable impact on rural development.







**2.0**

# **Literature Reviews and theoretical framework**



## 2.1 Conceptual Clarification

1

**Non-Governmental Organizations:** The term “NGO” was first introduced in Article 71 of the United Nations’ Charter in 1945. NGOs, or non-governmental organizations, are citizen-based associations that operate independently of governments to deliver resources or serve social purposes. They are non-profit organizations that are formed to address social, health, economic and environmental problems and provide services that governments may not be able to effectively handle on their own (Uileberg, 2009). NGOs can operate at the local, national, or international level and cover a wide range of issues.

2

**Youth:** Youth is a complex and multifaceted concept that varies across cultures and contexts. According to Adebayo (1997), youth is the time of life when one is young, often referred to as the period between childhood and adulthood. The specific age range of youth varies and is not defined chronologically; its endpoint is not tied to specific activities such as unpaid work or having sexual relations. Youth is shaped significantly by cultural norms and traditions, influencing an individual’s level of dependency on their family, both emotionally and economically (Imhonopi & Urim, 2018). However, for the purpose of this study, youth can be viewed as young persons between the age of 18 to 45 years old.

3

**Rural community:** Rural community is a social unit that shares common characteristics, interests, values, or a geographic location. Rural communities can be diverse in their forms and functions, but they generally provide a sense of belonging and identity to their members. Rural community social structures in rural areas are often tight knit, with strong community bonds and a sense of collective responsibility (Apata, Apata, Igbalajobi & Awoniy (2010). Cultural traditions and customs are often more pronounced and preserved in rural areas. Infrastructure is often less developed, with fewer roads and transportation options. Public transport may be limited or non-existent. Access to utilities such as electricity, clean water, and sanitation may be less reliable. There may be limited access to modern technology and internet connectivity.

The primary economic activity in many rural areas is agriculture, including The primary economic activity in many rural areas is agriculture, including farming, livestock, and fishing. Small-scale, home-based industries such as weaving, pottery, and local crafts are common. Mining, forestry, and other resource extraction activities may also be significant. Employment opportunities may

be limited, often leading to lower income levels and higher poverty rates compared to urban areas. Rural areas may have fewer schools, which are often under-resourced and located far from students' homes. Healthcare facilities are fewer and farther between. Access to specialized medical care is often limited. Public health challenges may include higher rates of malnutrition, infectious diseases, and maternal and infant mortality. Rural communities often maintain traditional practices and lifestyles, including local festivals, dances, and rituals. Local dialects and languages may be more prevalent and preserved in rural areas. Religious practices and institutions often play a significant role in community life. Outmigration, especially of younger people, is a significant issue, leading to a demographic imbalance and potential economic decline. Farida & Adisa (2005) observed that rural areas often lag in development indicators such as income, education, and healthcare. Rural communities, especially those dependent on agriculture, are highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

There is potential for sustainable development initiatives, including eco-tourism, renewable energy projects, and sustainable agriculture. Strengthening local governance and community organizations can help in better resource management and development planning. Integrating technology for education, healthcare, and economic activities can significantly improve living standards.



## 2.2 Role of NGOs on Development in Nigeria

The work undertaken by NGOs are wide-ranging, but NGOs' roles can be usefully analysed as having three main components: implementer, catalyst, and partner (Lewis, 2007). The implementer's role involves mobilizing resources to provide goods and services to people who need them. NGOs deliver services across various fields, such as healthcare, microfinance, agricultural extension, emergency relief, and human rights. This role has become more prominent as NGOs increasingly respond to artificial emergencies or natural disasters with humanitarian assistance. The catalyst can be defined as an NGO's ability to inspire, facilitate, or contribute to improved thinking and action to promote social transformation. The role of partners reflects the growing trend for NGOs to work with government, donors, and the private sector on joint activities, such as providing specific inputs within a broader multiagency program or project or undertaking socially responsible business initiatives. It also includes activities among NGOs and with communities, such as 'capacity building' work, which seeks to develop and strengthen capacities. Furthermore, studies have shown that the developmental activities of most NGOs in Nigeria usually focus on nature conservation, skill acquisition, economic empowerment, disease control, and management, literacy schemes, capacity building, amenities provision, conflict resolution, charity, and peace promotion, which are all critical for development (Eni, 2005).

Another study by Adebayo (1997) revealed that most NGOs in Nigeria focus on development-related issues, which indicates a positive drive to stamp out the poverty plaguing Nigerians at distinct levels. Again, NGOs have been increasing their involvement in rural development activities in Nigeria. However, in more recent times, it has



been observed that certain factors have been limiting their performance in contributing to rural development. In this regard, Faride & Adisa (2005) reported that the constraints facing NGOs in Nigeria range from poor collaboration with government agencies, political instability, and strong affiliation to overdependence on donor partners and corrupt practices in some cases. Traditionally, most donor organizations work only with NGOs with legal status that can produce project proposals, plan correctly, and produce reports regularly.

According to the Nigeria Network of NGOs (NNNGO) cited in FGN (2010), all NGOs in Nigeria are divided into eight areas or spheres where they have enormously contributed their quota to the Nation's development. These areas include

youth development; NGOs in this sphere have dealt with issues concerning or relating to young people. On democracy and good governance, NGOs in this area or sphere of interest cover legal issues around democracy in Nigeria. This includes corruption, public finance, and law, among others. Examples of some NGOs in this area include Governance for Democratization, International Press Centre, and Media for Democracy, which has helped and continue to help Nigeria's nascent democracy improve. Another area is the environment. NGOs in this area focus on environmental policies, climate change, and natural resources, to mention a few. Among them are the Earth Right Environmental Network Initiative and the Environmental and Tourism Support Initiative, whose activities have helped address several environmental challenges, like cleaning the Ogoni Kingdom in Niger Delta.

Another area where NGOs' impacts have been felt in Nigeria is the health sector, which provides most rural Nigerians with accessible health care. This also includes providing medical and moral support to people living with HIV/Aids and sensitizing others on how to avoid contracting the virus. The fight against several deadly health conditions was only won in some cases with the

efforts of most NGOs in this sphere of influence. Some NGOs cover the spheres of research and policy. Their activities revolve around research on policies and economic development that has helped improve Nigeria's financial and political situation.

Finally, from a broader scale, Cernea (1988) stressed that NGOs embodied a philosophy that recognizes the centrality of people in development policies, but so much was expected of them, which came to be seen in some quarters as a "quick fix" for development challenges. This, therefore, led to a backlash against NGOs by the end of the 1990s, when the evidence began to suggest that they had only partially lived up to these unrealistically high and tall expectations globally (Lewis, 2007). Despite the backlash, in 2004, it was estimated that NGOs were responsible for about \$US 23 billion of total aid money, or approximately one-third of total Official Development Assistant (ODA), suggesting that Official Development Assistance provided through NGOs had increased from 4.6% in 1995 to 13% in 2004, and that the total aid volume increased from US\$ 59 billion to US\$ 78.6 billion in the same period (Riddell, 2007).

## 2.3 Theoretical Framework

This study adopted and applied the functionalist theory to the phenomenon under study. Proponents of functionalism (Emile Durkheim, Auguste Comte, Talcott Parsons etc) think of society as a living organism in which each part of the organism contributes to its holistic and communal survival. The functionalist perspective, also known as functionalism, is a primary theoretical framework in sociology, originating from the work of Emile Durkheim. It focuses on understanding how social order and stability are achieved in a society. This

perspective examines the macro-level social structure rather than the micro-level of everyday life and emphasizes how different parts of a society are structured to maintain its stability (Schaefer, 2008). One way to introduce functionalism or functionalist theory, according to Alubo (2012), is to look at the word function; what is the function of the school? The Police station? and in this context, non-governmental organizations (NGOs)? In everyday language, function refers to roles, purposes, and contributions; from a theoretical perspective,



functionalism has similar meanings.

The theory starts with an organismic analogy; it likens human society to some biological organism. Based on this analogy, the theory holds that society has a structure, and within this structure, there are differentiated parts that perform different functions; even as they perform different functions, all parts are interrelated. Furthermore, the parts are also interdependent such that what affects one part affects the entire organism. The different parts, like the government and non-governmental organizations, work together to maintain equilibrium or a good working form for the smooth running of the system. Exponents of the theory see society as a vast network of connected parts, each helping to maintain the system as a whole. Many sociologists have criticized functionalism for overlooking the potential negative consequences of social order. Some, like Italian theorist Gramsci (1985), argue that the perspective justifies the status quo and cultural hegemony.

Functionalism does not promote active involvement in social change, even when it

could be beneficial. It views agitating for social change as undesirable since the various parts of society will naturally compensate for any arising problems. Despite these criticisms, the capacity of the theory to capture and provide a vivid explanation of society as an organism with different parts, like Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) among others, playing or performing their different role for the holistic survival and smooth running of the system in this context, the Nigerian state prove potent and relevant for addressing the phenomenon under study.

This theory is relevant to this study because, NGOs have played and continue to play a vital function/role in diverse sectors like health, education, politics, economy, and legal in the Nigerian states, complementing the efforts of the federal, state, and local governments to the advancement and survival of the Nigerian state hence the relevance of the theory to this study despite the criticisms advanced by scholars who are opposed to it.







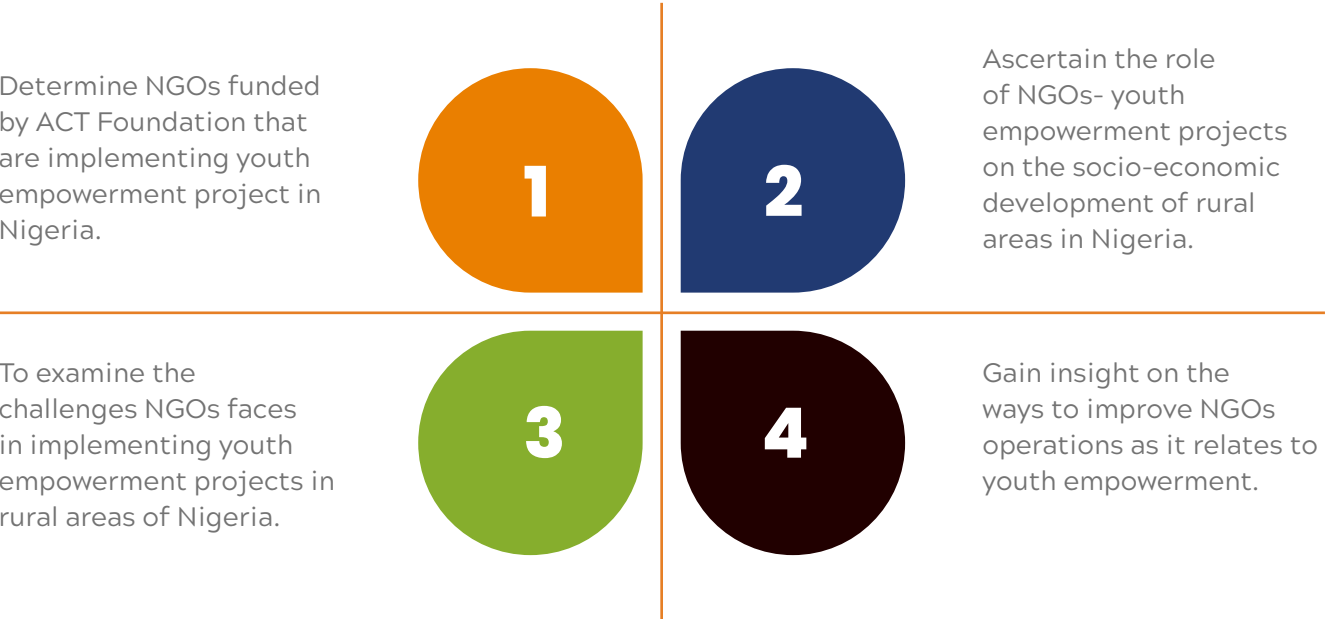
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# **Objectives of the study**



# Objectives

The major objective of this research is to systematically explore the impact of NGO youth empowerment programs on socio-economic development of rural communities in Nigeria. The specific objectives include;



## 3.1 Research Question

To achieve the objectives of this study, the following research questions guided the study:

Are there NGOs funded by ACT Foundation that are implementing youth empowerment projects in Nigeria	?
To what extent does youth empowerment projects impact socio-economic development of rural areas in Nigeria	?
What are the challenges NGOs face in implementing youth empowerment projects in Nigeria	?
In what ways can NGOs improve its operations as it relates to youth empowerment in rural areas of Nigeria	?

## 3.2 Justification for the study

Nigeria faces an alarming youth unemployment crisis, which has led to increased poverty, social exclusion, and unrest among the youth population. Despite numerous empowerment programs, the unemployment rate remains high, indicating that existing initiatives may not be effectively addressing the needs of the youth.

Research shows that while awareness of youth empowerment programs is significant (74.6%), only a small fraction of youths (17.2%) have benefited from these initiatives. Furthermore, among those who have participated, only 41.2% are engaged in activities related to their training, suggesting a disconnect between training and practical application.

The socio-economic development of rural areas is crucial for national growth. Empowering youth through skills acquisition and entrepreneurship can lead to job creation, poverty alleviation, and overall economic diversification. This study aims to explore how effectively these programs contribute to such outcomes, thereby providing insights into their role in fostering sustainable development in rural communities.

There is a pressing need for empirical data to inform policy decisions and improve the design and implementation of youth empowerment initiatives. By assessing the current state of these programs, this study seeks to identify best practices and areas for improvement, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness of NGO interventions.

The youth demographic is a vital force for change in society. Harnessing their potential through empowerment initiatives can not only improve their individual circumstances but also contribute to broader socio-economic stability and growth. This study will highlight the importance of investing in youth as a means to achieve national development goals.

In summary, this study is justified by the urgent need to address youth unemployment, evaluate the effectiveness of current empowerment programs, and provide actionable recommendations that can enhance the socio-economic progress of rural areas in Nigeria.







**4.0**

# **Methodology**



## 4.1 Sample Size and Sampling techniques

The selection of the four NGOs was conducted with careful consideration of their historical performance in youth empowerment interventions focused on young people in Nigeria. The researchers referred to the official list of NGOs in Nigeria and reviewed the websites of these organizations to verify their past work and interventions in youth empowerment. Additionally, the researchers volunteered with some of these NGOs to gain a deeper understanding of the reach and impact of their entrepreneurial interventions.

The chosen NGOs were selected based on their extensive experience in youth empowerment initiatives, with a minimum of two years of operation. This criterion was crucial as the study aimed to explore the impact of NGO youth empowerment programs on the socioeconomic development of rural communities in Nigeria.

Therefore, it was essential to select NGOs with a strong track record in providing solid entrepreneurial platforms, experienced staff, substantial staff strength, and a history of successful youth empowerment programs.

For this study, the researcher specifically interviewed program staff who coordinate and strategically manage empowerment programs within the NGOs, as well as the beneficiaries of these programs. Out of the four NGOs selected, three consented to participate in the study, while one declined. The total number of staff participants was three, representing each of the three NGOs. Additionally, three beneficiaries were selected from each of the three participating NGOs, although one beneficiary declined to participate.

## 4.2 Method of data collection

The researchers conducted virtual Key Informant Interviews (KII) because it is an exploratory study that needs an extensive feedback and clarity on the topic being investigated or researched. The flexibility it gives the researcher to ask questions, thoroughly investigate concepts or points raised in the course of gathering data and make adjustments, if necessary, to make it suitable for this study. It gives the researcher better insights or knowledge to ask follow-up questions and comparatively analyse the points and themes raised by respondents. It gives the researcher the flexibility to seek clarification on grey areas that needs further clarity or explanation (Patrick & Linda, 2013).

Interviews afforded the researcher to get primary data which is a major requirement for this study because the objectives of the research to explore the Impact of NGO youth empowerment initiatives on socioeconomic advancement in rural areas of Nigeria as such it is necessary to get respondents (beneficiaries of the intervention and the Program Staff of the NGOs) to speak directly instead of gathering secondary data that may not be robust and suitable for this study.



Fig 1: Codes for NGOs and Portfolios of Respondents

S/N	Name of NGO	Interview Method	Category of respondent	Interview code
1	Africa Business Radio	Key Informant Interview (KII)	Program Staff	ABR_PS
2	Africa Business Radio	KII	Beneficiary	ABR_B
3	Aspels Charity and Development Foundation	KII	Program Staff	Asp_PS
4	Junior Achievement Nigeria	KII	Program Staff	JAN_PS
5	Junior Achievement Nigeria	KII	Beneficiary	JAN_B

Source: ACT Foundation 2024 Internal Research

## 4.3 Data Analysis Process

ACT Foundation's research team carefully transcribed the interview recordings to ensure accuracy. Each transcript was meticulously checked against the original recordings to confirm fidelity to participants' responses. The researcher personally handled the transcription of all data to maintain the integrity and authenticity of the information collected. At no point did the researcher introduce personal interpretations or thoughts into the transcripts, thereby preserving the original context and detail provided by the participants.

Despite occasional disruptions caused by background noise and intermittent conversations with colleagues during the interviews, the researcher successfully transcribed all data with high accuracy.

The transcribed data were then imported into the Dedoose software for analysis. Thematic analysis was employed to extract meaningful patterns and themes from the qualitative data.

This process began after the transcripts had been fully verified. Using Dedoose version 9.2.005, the researcher organized and managed the data effectively, utilizing its indexing and search functionalities. The software facilitated the coding of transcripts for word frequency and semantic phrases, which were then assessed in relation to the interview questions. This approach enabled the identification of significant themes and underlying meanings within the data.

To enhance the clarity and comprehension of the findings, the analyzed data were presented using bar charts and pie charts. These visualizations provided a clear representation of key patterns and trends, allowing for easier interpretation of the results and facilitating a more engaging presentation of the data. By employing these graphical tools, the study effectively communicated the insights derived from the thematic analysis, making it accessible to a broader audience.







**5.0**

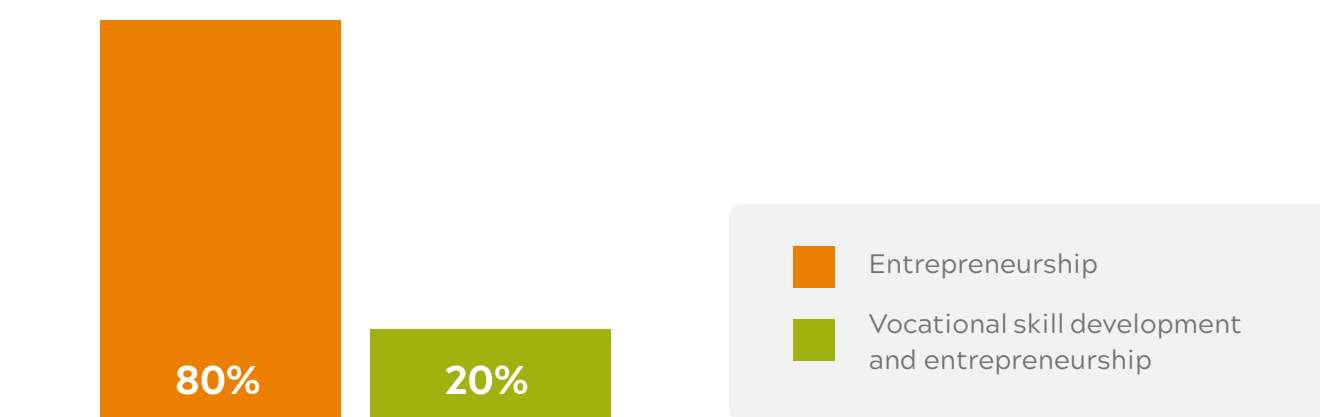
# **Study Outcomes**



## 5.1 NGO project focus area and overview of project

This section presents the analysis of the data collected through interviews with five respondents from three NGOs funded by ACT Foundation and implementing youth empowerment programs in rural Nigeria. The analysis aims to answer the key research questions of the study.

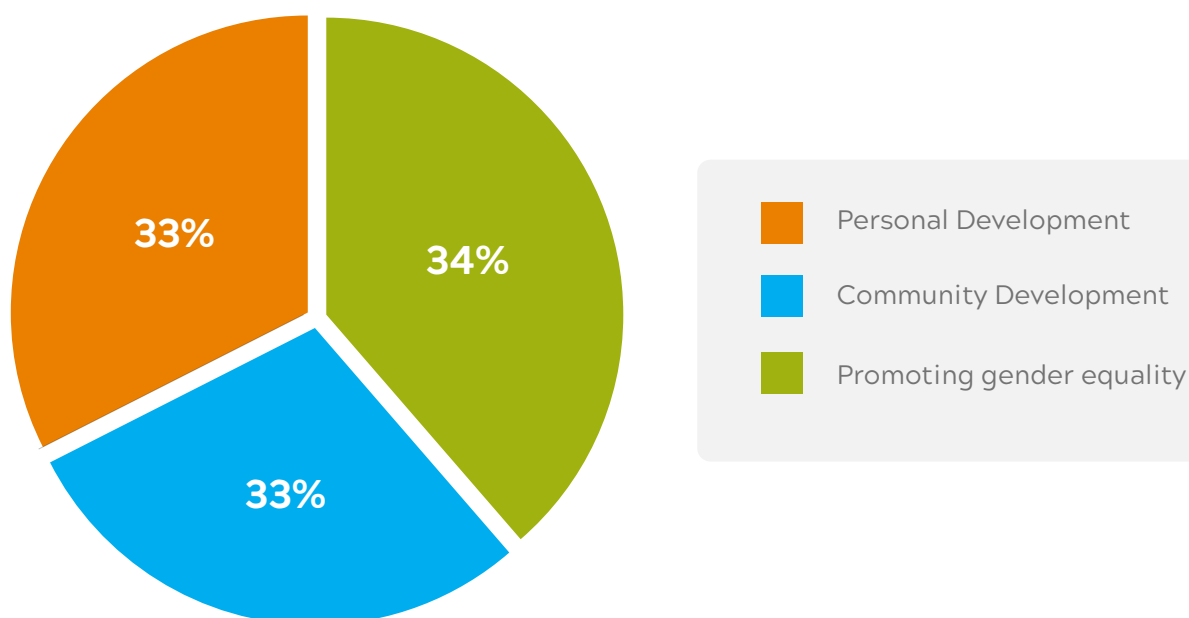
**Fig 2: Project focus area**



Out of the five respondents of the study, four representing 80% of the respondents NGOs that focused on entrepreneurship development initiatives, while one respondent representing 20% focused on both vocational skill development and entrepreneurship.

## 5.2 Impact of NGO Youth Empowerment Initiatives on Socioeconomic Advancement in Rural Areas of Nigeria

All the respondents cited significant impact of their NGOs youth empowerment initiatives on the socioeconomic advancement of rural areas in Nigeria.

**Fig 3: Impact of NGO Youth Empowerment Initiatives on Socioeconomic Development**

## 5.2.1 Impact on Beneficiaries personal development



The findings from this study shows that respondents learned essential bookkeeping skills, such as tracking sales, income, expenses, and documenting customer interactions. This new found skill allowed her to understand her financial status better, knowing exactly how

much money she was making and when she was at a loss.

Participation in the program boosted the respondent's confidence significantly. She became more assured of her business decisions

and her overall business direction. Her communication skills improved, especially in dealing with customers. This also helped her manage her personal spending habits better. The program taught her effective sales strategies, including how to negotiate prices without compromising on the quality of her products. The respondents now understand the importance of maintaining product quality and setting fair prices, even if it means negotiating with customers for a slightly lower price than initially quoted. The program also provided access to expert advice and insights, which were previously unavailable to the respondent. This exposure helped the respondent implement better business practices and grow her business. Graduates have gone on to start their own businesses, using skills from the program. As evidenced by responses from respondents:

“

*I did not know anything about all these skills, all these social media, managing social media, influencing content creation, all those things I knew nothing about. It was after I learned, I started thinking, OK, how can I get customers? How can I get more awareness? How can people see my business and patronize me more? And personally, I am someone that spends a lot. It has helped me, like, gauge my spending, buying necessary things, not things. It made me buy things I need, not things I want. And my communication skills are proved OK, especially with my customers and all. It made me actually more confidence, made me more confidence and like gave me assurance that I knew what I was doing. Well, when I was in on the program, you brought the specialist, like how would I call it an expert, an accountant, Yes, And what he told me to like he gave me some insights like he told me to keep bookings, like I should keep tabs of my sales income and outgo like everything that is coming in and how I'm spending the money, the customers I'm getting maybe in a year or in a month, I should just make sure that they are documented, which I wasn't doing before and I'm doing it now. And you made so intense was like actually, I knew I was making money, even if it wasn't much. I knew I was making money, but I did not know like how much I was making. But when I started keeping books, I knew that OK, this is just the amount I make and OK, this is when I am at loss.” (Respondent; ABR\_B)*

*“For example: A participant launched a fashion brand; another developed a gas leakage detector” (Respondent: JAN\_PS)*

## 5.2.2 Impact on rural community development

As revealed from the study, beneficiaries used their new skills to start businesses and employ others within their communities. As beneficiaries became successful, their families and wider community also benefited from their

economic activities and employment creation. Additionally, the program inspired a wider interest in tech skills within the community. Respondents Stated:



“

OK, so hitherto now, Yeah, I get where you are going to, but let me explain it before now, before the project, before they became participants in the project right? They only had minimal knowledge of tech. Or tech skills. And they also do not know the market aspect of tech, the marketability aspect of tech, developing a product and pitching the products and scaling the product they didn't, they didn't know that part of tech. So, with the programme, the Start and Grow Initiative they were able to learn that part of the entrepreneurial part of tech, is not just about learning to be a tech bro and a tech sis because well. But people are empowered to start, own businesses, scale it. They begin to make profits that impact their community, but also, they begin to like, you know, employ people within the community  
**(Respondent: Asp\_PS)**

“

OK for me, starting with our immediate environment then, which was our school, we had opportunities to meet our students, both junior and seniors, talk to them about how they could assist in making our space cleaner. So, we started out by cleaning up the school gathering W we even held an event called a baggy day, a baggy day event in school, which helped make people encourage them to bring plastic waste from their homes for us to use in creating our products. So that really got them involved for my team. It was lots of fun doing that in school then and we learned a whole lot before we were just enclosed in just our school, our community.

Well, it helped us to think beyond that, to go beyond borders and see that there's possibilities in reaching out. **(Respondent: JAN\_B)**

Furthermore, the findings from the study shows that the program increased awareness among youth about entrepreneurship and the importance of sustainability in business. It highlighted the necessity of being innovative and creative, encouraging more young people to pursue entrepreneurship. The program focuses on low and middle-income communities, aiming to provide opportunities and address local problems.

“

For example: Students in a rural area developed a charcoal alternative from banana peels, addressing local waste and creating a healthier product **(Respondent: JAN\_PS)**

## 5.2.3 Impact on promoting Gender Equality

Youth empowerment initiatives were found to be inclusive, ensuring that all genders had an equal say and opportunity to showcase their work and ideas. It helped break down gender stereotypes, especially in fields traditionally dominated by men, such as footwear making.

The program made a conscious effort to include and support women in tech, a field traditionally dominated by men. It Created an environment conducive to women's learning and development in tech. It also featured successful women in tech as mentors to inspire participants. It provided women with skills and confidence to thrive in tech roles and business ventures.

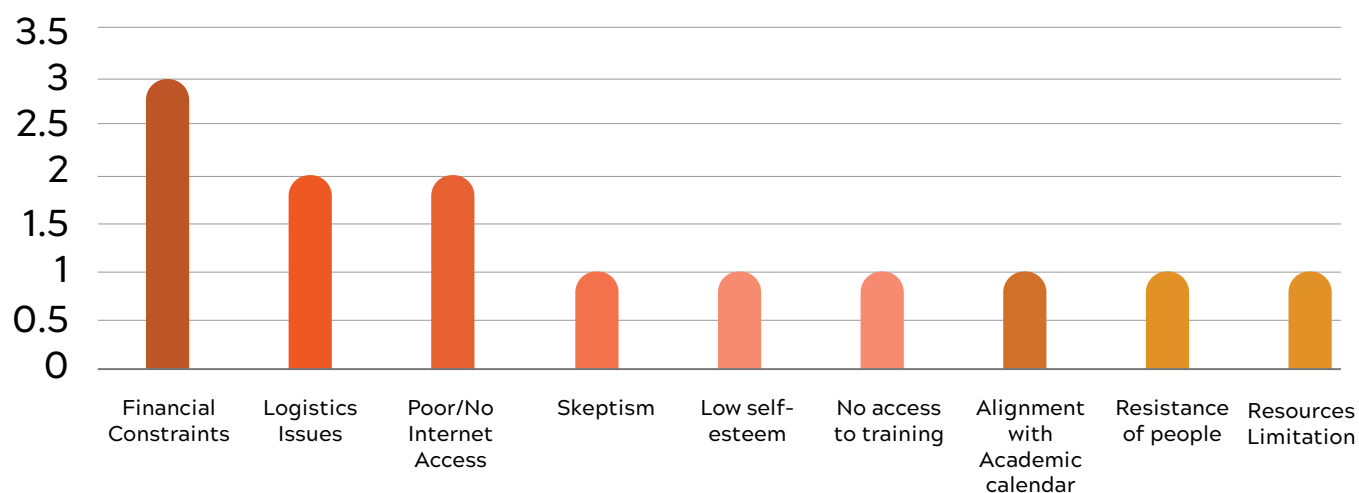
The program navigated cultural biases that might discourage women from pursuing tech careers. By engaging with community leaders and stakeholders, the initiative aimed to shift cultural perceptions and encourage support for women in tech. The respondents maintained that:

“

*Like on the show when I was asked when I just started learning my footwears, I was getting comments like why are you doing a dirty job? That is a man's job. And my reply is always it is not a dirty job as far as giving me money as far as I know what I'm doing. And it is not a man's job. They did not write it that it is meant for men. It is a job anybody can do. So, there is no, there is nothing like gender. It is not gender based. If you see it is something you can do, go for it and do your best. And I feel it has given it has opened eyes, the eyes of a lot of youth into being something innovative and creative. Now they are more entrepreneurs than even serious business owners themselves. Like the percentage of business owned, percentage of entrepreneurs now presently in Lagos is even more than people that own businesses and people that even own that have nine to five jobs. (Respondent: ABR\_B)*

“

*Yes, this is one of the things that I like the most about Start and Grow Initiative because you find that even within the tech community, it is saturated with men. There are lots of men and obviously often times is not a safe space for women. So, the Start and Grow Initiative created two things; safe space for women to thrive, to learn tech skills. But also, to be to close the gender gap, within the tech community to we were able to a large extent if I say so myself [haha]. We were able to do that. We had amazing young women learning these tech skills and using it and learning it in a convenient community. Where there is no issue of gender bias and all of that. It is safe for them to be able to express themselves and learn from one another. We taught them team building, and working within teams, right? So, it is a healthy competition between them to learn these skills to pitch their products, to develop their products. Within their community, this was exceptional because. before they take before the Start and Grow Initiative, there were less women within the community having these tech skills or building these tech products, or scaling it to make money. (Respondent: Asp\_PS)*

**fig 4: Challenges encountered by NGOs during project implementation.**

## 5.3.1 Scepticism

Initially, the respondents was sceptical about the program, doubting its relevance and the benefits of attending a radio program. The respondent overcame this scepticism by deciding to try it, recognizing the value of the opportunity and the potential for personal and professional growth.

## 5.3.2 Low self-esteem

Participants, especially women, often underestimated their capabilities. The respondents noted that hands-on training and motivational support addressed confidence and capability concerns.

## 5.3.3 Financial Constraints

Entrepreneurs often lack the financial resources to consult experts. The program addresses this by providing expert advice and training at no cost.

## 5.3.4 Logistical Issues

Some participants require financial support for transportation to attend the program. Difficulty in getting professionals to volunteer their time consistently. Transitioning some classes online and providing stipends for data helped mitigate access issues.



## 5.3.5 Digital Divide/poor access to internet network

The program is largely digital, which can exclude those without reliable internet access. A potential solution is to partner with telecom companies to provide zero-rated access to the program.

## 5.3.6 No access to training equipment/materials

Lack of access to laptops.

## 5.3.7 Alignment with Academic Calendar

Balancing program activities with school schedules.

## 5.3.8 Resistance of people

Overcoming initial resistance or lack of exposure to entrepreneurship concepts.

## 5.3.9 Resources Limitation

Both financial and human resources can be limiting factors.

Some Respondents stated that;

“

*There was the issue of lack of access to laptops and all of that. There was also the issue of not having because you know that while the project was ongoing, we had the economic problem. There was a barrier of “I’m a woman and this is supposed to be a man’s a man’s domain.” We do not think that women are supposed to be in tech, and we had to show them examples of women who are thriving in tech. An example was one of our staff, Jennifer Odunze who was part of the ABOCODER programme. Then from there grew to become a tutor within Aspilos Foundation and then is currently a Programme Officer at Aspilos Foundation and also a women technical ambassador. So, we showed them that this is a real-life example of someone who did not even have any tech skill, any tech knowledge at all, but with the training that they got, they were able to get to the height of being a women technical ambassador. So, it is not something that is only for men. Women can do it, you know. Other examples of women who are. (Respondent: Asp\_PS)*

“

*It takes a long while for us to reshape that mindset and bring them to the space where they can, you know, eventually come up with something innovative and creative for them to make use of and develop their community. (Respondent: JAN\_PS)*

“

*At first, when I got the, when they spoke to me about it, I was like radio program that I mean, he’s listening to radio nowadays. (Respondent: ABR\_B)*





## 5.4 Role of Stakeholders/partners on NGOs youth empowerment projects

Local government and organizational partnerships were found to be crucial for facilitating outreach and recruitment in indigent communities, enhancing the credibility and impact of the program. And leveraging government and local stakeholders to access resources and participants.

Partnerships with local governments and organizations were also found crucial for accessing schools and ensuring the program's sustainability. Such partnerships enable the program to reach more students and gain necessary approvals.

As evidence by the respondents, who stated that:

“

*We do partner with various organization because most of the professionals that we work with, most time they are all on volunteer basis. So, they representing the organization in this particular edition, in our implementation. (Respondent: Asp\_PS)*

“

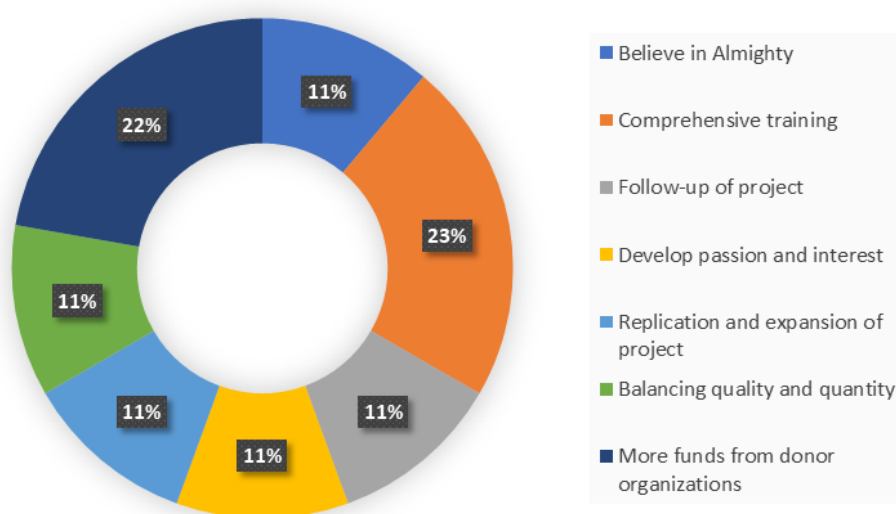
*Government agencies like NYSC right to get across, so you find that these people are very impactful. They are very key in getting both the participants that you want but also showing the genuineness and highlighting the impact of the work that you do.*

**(Respondent: Asp\_PS)**



## 5.5 Recommendations for NGOs

fig 5: Recommendations



### 5.5.1 Focus on God and Values

The participant emphasized the importance of putting God first, distinguishing this from religion. She believes that having a spiritual foundation can provide clarity in decision-making.

### 5.5.2 Comprehensive Training

NGOs should not only teach technical skills but also focus on soft skills such as communication, marketing, and customer engagement.

### 5.5.3 Follow-up

Follow-up support is crucial to ensure that the resources provided (like machines or laptops) are utilized effectively.



## 5.5.4 Focus on God and Values

It is important to ensure that the youth are genuinely interested in the skills they are learning. Passion drives long-term commitment and success in business.

## 5.5.5 Replication and Expansion

NGOs like ACT Foundation should consider replicating successful models to increase capacity and impact. Expansion to include more community-based and accessible platforms.

## 5.5.6 Balancing Quality and Quantity

Focus on the quality of impact rather than just the number of participants. Sustainable and high-quality support should be prioritized to ensure long-term benefits.

## 5.5.7 More funds from donor organizations

Recommends that donor organizations assess the impact and efficiency of funded programs and consider increasing funding to expand their reach.

The respondents assert that:

“

*OK, well I think NGOs should try to pick people at earlier ages, more younger people, not just restricted to secondary school, but like Junior Achievements, it was for a secondary school only. I feel that if they're able to create programs for people that are also in other institutions, they could make Nigerians feel that Nigerian youths to feel that they also have a voice and creating a space for interviews after the whole session, after the whole session, make people ask like get to meet people again and ask them how far are you going with this thing? (Respondent: JAN\_B)*

“

*It is also the place of being able to help political leaders with the specific initiative that will directly support youth and entrepreneurs in the country to further achieve the agenda of economic development. But more importantly, in my opinion, I think I have come to also contend with the idea of wanting to reach very large all at once, which sometimes what are the impacts to water down the impact a little bit. It is good to want to maximize the resources, but sometimes we have to look at, OK, quality should also matter as much as quantity issue also matter. And so, as an organization, but we are beginning to learn that power ties quality. So, that is my hope. You need to probably replicate yourself. OK, replicate them so that there is a bigger capacity. I think what we need to do would be that instead of waiting for the youth to migrate to the urban centre in the cities, we need to make sure that we create programmes and set up structure to age their development and their empowerment also across rural communities in our country. (Respondent: ABR\_PS)*

“

*Firstly, I would say before going into business, I think you should put them on the way of God, not religion. God first, not religion 'cause religion is really messing us up in this country. Now I said God first because as a business owner, there are some decisions you want to make that you get to that level of confusion that you will not even know what to do. I think they should follow up because at the end of the day, some people, they eventually sell the machine, some they just drop the machine somewhere. I feel when you empower youths, some give them laptops, some give them machines to be skilled and they require the machine required for the skill they learned. I feel you should follow up.*

**(Respondent: ABR\_B)**



An aerial photograph of a village with a large orange shape on the left side. The orange shape is a vertical rectangle with rounded corners, containing the text '6.0' in white. The background shows a village with several buildings, including a large white building with a red roof, and a large green field. In the foreground, there are several buildings with tiled roofs and balconies. The background features a large hill or mountain range under a clear blue sky.

**6.0**

# **Discussion of Findings**



This study systematically explores the impact of youth empowerment programs funded by the Aspire Coronation Trust (ACT) Foundation on the socio-economic development of rural communities in Nigeria. After careful analysis of response of the five (5) participants representing three (3) ACT Foundation grantee organizations implementing youth empowerment focused initiatives, the findings from the study revealed that the majority of the NGOs (80%) concentrated on entrepreneurship development, while a smaller portion (20%) integrated vocational skill development into their programs. This focus underscores the importance of entrepreneurship as a pathway for socioeconomic advancement in rural areas.

The findings indicate that participants gained critical skills that significantly enhanced their personal and professional lives. For instance, respondents reported improvements in bookkeeping, communication, and business decision-making. One participant noted that learning to track sales and expenses transformed her understanding of her financial status, leading to better spending habits and increased confidence in her business decisions. This personal growth was echoed by multiple respondents who highlighted the importance of mentorship and expert guidance in fostering these skills.

The empowerment initiatives not only benefited individual participants but also had a ripple effect on their communities. Many beneficiaries started their own businesses, which in turn created job opportunities for others. The programs sparked an interest in technology and entrepreneurship among youth, encouraging them to innovate and address local challenges, such as developing sustainable products from waste materials. This collective entrepreneurial spirit contributed to the economic vitality of rural areas.

The findings from this study also highlighted the role of these initiatives in promoting gender equality. Programs were designed to be inclusive, providing women with opportunities to engage in traditionally male-dominated fields, such as technology and entrepreneurship. Respondents

emphasized the importance of creating safe spaces for women to learn and grow, which helped to dismantle gender stereotypes. The presence of female mentors further inspired participants to pursue careers in tech and business, fostering a more equitable environment.

Despite the positive outcomes, several challenges were identified in the implementation of these programs. Respondents expressed initial skepticism about the relevance of the initiatives, which was overcome through hands-on training and motivational support. Financial constraints, logistical issues, and a digital divide were significant barriers that limited access to training and resources. Additionally, cultural biases and resistance to new ideas posed challenges that required strategic engagement with community leaders to shift perceptions.

The involvement of local governments and partnerships with organizations proved crucial for the success of these initiatives. Collaborations enhanced outreach efforts, provided credibility, and facilitated access to resources. Respondents noted that leveraging these partnerships was essential for sustaining the programs and ensuring they reached the intended beneficiaries.

**Based on the findings, several recommendations emerged for enhancing the effectiveness of youth empowerment programs:**

1

**Comprehensive Training:** NGOs should provide a balanced curriculum that includes both technical and soft skills.

2

**Follow-up Support:** Ongoing support post-training is vital to ensure that participants effectively utilize the resources provided.

3

**Engaging Younger Audiences:**

Expanding programs to include younger demographics could foster early interest in entrepreneurship.

4

**Focus on Quality:** Prioritizing the quality of training and support over sheer numbers will lead to more sustainable outcomes.

5

**Increased Funding:** NGOs should advocate for more funding from donor organizations to expand their reach and impact.

6

**Spiritual Foundation:** Encouraging a values-based approach to business can guide decision-making and foster resilience among young entrepreneurs.

These findings reflect the transformative potential of youth empowerment programs in rural Nigeria, emphasizing the need for continued support and innovation to overcome existing challenges.





An aerial photograph of a village with a large orange shape on the left side. The orange shape is a vertical rectangle with rounded corners, containing the text '7.0' in white. The village below features a mix of traditional stone buildings with tiled roofs and modern structures, surrounded by green fields and a line of tall, thin trees. In the background, there are rolling hills under a clear blue sky.

**7.0**

**Conclusion**



This study provides valuable insights into the impact of youth empowerment programs funded by the Aspire Coronation Trust (ACT) Foundation on the socioeconomic development of rural communities in Nigeria. The findings highlight the significant role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in driving positive change and addressing the challenges faced by rural youth.

The research reveals that NGO-led initiatives have a profound impact on the personal development of beneficiaries, equipping them with essential skills in entrepreneurship, vocational training, and technology. Participants reported increased confidence, improved communication abilities, and better financial management practices. These enhancements not only benefit the individuals but also have a ripple effect on their communities, as graduates start their own businesses and create employment opportunities for others.

Moreover, the programs foster a spirit of innovation and sustainability among youth, encouraging them to develop creative solutions to local problems. The study showcases examples of young entrepreneurs addressing waste management issues and creating eco-friendly alternatives to traditional products. This collective effort contributes to the overall economic vitality and environmental sustainability of rural areas.

However, the research also highlights the challenges faced by NGOs during project implementation, such as initial skepticism from beneficiaries, financial constraints, logistical issues, and the digital divide. These barriers underscore the need for a more comprehensive approach to youth empowerment, one that involves collaboration with local stakeholders, strategic partnerships, and targeted interventions to address specific community needs.

To enhance the effectiveness of these programs, the study recommends a focus on comprehensive

training, including both technical and soft skills, as well as ongoing follow-up support to ensure the sustainability of outcomes. Engaging younger audiences and prioritizing quality over quantity can lead to more impactful and long-lasting results. Additionally, advocating for increased funding from donor organizations can enable NGOs to expand their reach and create more opportunities for rural youth.

The selection of the three organizations for the study was likely influenced by several strategic considerations: alignment with the objectives of the research, as time, resources, and accessibility. By concentrating on organizations that are already recognized for their impactful work, the study can effectively assess best practices and identify areas for improvement. However, future ACT Foundation studies on the same subject matter will consider expanding the sample size beyond the three organizations involved in this research. Including a wider range of NGOs across different regions of Nigeria can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impacts of youth empowerment programs. This could also involve comparative studies between urban and rural settings to assess how geographical factors influence program effectiveness.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates the transformative potential of youth empowerment programs in rural Nigeria. By investing in the skills and potential of young people, NGOs can catalyze socioeconomic change and contribute to the overall development of rural communities. However, to maximize their impact, NGOs must address the challenges they face and adopt a more holistic approach that prioritizes collaboration, innovation, and sustainability. With continued support and commitment, these programs can unlock the vast potential of rural youth and create a more equitable and prosperous future for all.

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