

# **Youth Empowerment Initiative as a Means to Overcome Poverty - Engagement of Youth in Sustainable Food Generation in Nigeria**

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## **Abstract**

This study examines youth empowerment initiative as a means to overcome poverty and the engagement of youth in sustainable food generation in Nigeria. The Adolescence Empowerment Cycle (AEC) model was employed as a theoretical guide in the study. A descriptive survey design was also adopted as the study methodology. The sample size was comprised of 245 participants of the Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES-O) in Oyo State, Nigeria who were selected through a multi-stage sampling technique. Both quantitative and qualitative data was collected through the use of a questionnaire and in-depth interviews. Findings from the study revealed that youth empowerment initiatives like small-scale retailing, crop and animal farming, artisanship, and information and communication technology training will significantly engage youths for productive developmental activities which can translate to poverty reduction and pro-poor growth. It can also propel youths to attach themselves firmly to positive social institutions which would in turn lead to the development of positive identity, employment opportunities, self-efficacy, and social bond. The implication of the research findings is that there is a need to engage the youth in food generation activities as part of the empowerment training in order to achieve the goal of poverty reduction and employment creation in Nigeria and other developing countries.

**Keywords:** Development, Empowerment, Food Generation, Nigeria, Poverty, Youth

**Word Count:** 197

## **Introduction**

Nigeria, as a developing country, is demographically green. This is, essentially, so because 96.86 percent (184,660,489) of the Nigerian population are below 65 years of age; 42.54 percent (81,102,008) fall within the age bracket of 0-14 years; 19.61 percent (37,384,412) fall within the age bracket of 15-24 years; 30.74 percent (58,604,042) fall within the age bracket of 25-54 years; 3.97 percent (7,570,027) fall within the age bracket of 55-64 years, while only 3.13 percent (5,971,772) are above the age of 65 years (Nigeria Demographics Profile, 2018). With this age structure, the Nigerian government, more than anything else, must provide quality healthcare delivery, food, education, security, infrastructure as well as employment opportunities for the young population. The provision of these existential needs, to a great extent, will enable the Nigerian government to secure, nurture and acquire all the socio-economic benefits and development potentials associated with her young population, efficiently. Unfortunately, empirical reports have revealed that Nigeria's young population is yet to be effectively and resourcefully groomed (Oluseyi, 2009; Okafor, 2011; Umukoro, 2013; Uddin and Uddin, 2013; Oduwole, 2015) because of a lack of proactive and responsible government programmes to vigorously engage the youths in the developmental agenda of the country. This supposition can be buttressed by the fact that Nigeria still remains at the top of the list of countries with high level of youth unemployment and poverty rate (Oluseyi, 2009; Okafor, 2011; Umukoro, 2013; Uddin and Uddin, 2013; Oduwole, 2015). Commenting on this condition, statistical data gathered from accredited sources showed that more than seventy-percent of Nigerian youths are unemployed (National Bureau of Statistics, 2016) and not less than fifty percent of Nigeria's population lives below the poverty line (World Bank Group Country Survey, 2016).

This pathetic state of affairs has ultimately placed youth unemployment and poverty matters as the most critical development challenges threatening Nigeria's efforts to meet sustainable development goals. There are strong reasons to show that this assumption is not wrong. For instance, studies conducted by Muhammad, Oye and Inuwa, (2011); Aiyedogbon and Ohwofasa, (2012); Shadare and Elegbede (2012); Adesina, (2013); Uddin and Uddin, (2013) and Oduwole, (2015), submitted that youth unemployment and poverty rate are the key factors predisposing youths to kidnapping, pipeline vandalism, cybercrime, robbery, terrorism, drug and human trafficking, and other social vices that are negating socio-economic development in contemporary Nigerian societies. Therefore, in an attempt to find a lasting solution to the problem of unemployment and poverty rate in Nigeria, youth empowerment initiatives have become essential. This is so because youth empowerment initiatives provide a veritable avenue for youth engagement and participation in different vocational training and skill acquisition programmes that will disconnect them from social vices and engage them actively for meaningful socio-economic development, human capacity building, and social bonding.

A review of the existant literature shows that the youth empowerment initiative (YEI) is a nascent scheme for human capacity building and utilization of human potentials in the realization of desirable socio-economic development. Consequent upon this, there are varieties of YEIs across regions of the world (Travis and Leech, 2014). Nevertheless, a universally guiding principle of youth empowerment initiatives exists in the value for human and social development. In Nigeria, youth empowerment initiatives are structured around formal and informal training, and teaching and learning that are mostly sponsored by the government at the federal, state and local government levels (Oviawe, 2010; Uddin and Uddin, 2013; Oduwole, 2015). For example, the common forms of YEIs at the federal level are the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), National Poverty Alleviation Programme (NAPEP), and Youth Enterprise with New Innovation in Nigeria (YOUWIN). While at the state level the popular YEIs include, State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (SEEDS), Ogun State Employment Generation programme (OGAGEP), Oyo State Youth Empowerment Scheme (OYES, also called YES-O), and the Lagos State Youth Empowerment Programme (LASYEP). Local level YEIs are subdivisions of the YEIs established at the state level. This is so because both state and local governments work hand in hand to ensure that there is effective reduction in youth unemployment and poverty rate in Nigeria. Moreover, participating in YEIs is on a voluntary basis but it usually involves a formal application and registration. While in some instances, applicants are asked to pay some money during the registration or enrolment stage in order to provide them with the tools and materials that are not sufficiently available in the training centers, so that applicants can have quality training, teaching, and learning.

This study is principally focused on the YES-O scheme in Oyo State, Nigeria. The scheme was formally inaugurated in December, 2011 with the aim of training and empowering unemployed youths in Oyo state, Nigeria. YES-O is a state-oriented program designed to equip trainees with vocational and entrepreneurship skills which would prepare the beneficiaries with the tools to create job opportunities and become self-reliant after the empowerment cycle. Unfortunately, studies conducted by researchers revealed that the present empowerment schemes in Nigeria might not yield the expected results if the program content is not designed in a way that would enable the youths to participate effectively in resolving Nigeria's protracted development challenges (see Aiyedogbon and Ohwofasa, 2014).

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study aims at examining, (1) the impact of the YES-O scheme in fostering self-reliance among youths in Oyo State, Nigeria; and (2) the influence of incorporating food generation activities in the YES-O scheme on poverty reduction in Oyo State, Nigeria.

## **Conceptual Clarifications**

To advance the understanding of this paper, brief clarifications on the meanings conveyed by key concepts adopted are presented below.

**What is Pro-poor Growth?** The term “pro-poor growth” has been accorded two equivalent definitions. The first definition construe pro-poor growth to mean an attempt to reduce poverty rate drastically, more than it would have decreased if all incomes had grown at the same rate (Baulch and McCulloch, 2000; Kakwani and Pernia, 2000), while the second definition describes “pro-poor growth” as the development that decreases the degree of poverty in a given society (Ravallion and Chen, 2003). These two definitions might seem too ambiguous to understand. However, a simple definition by the World Bank Group (2004) as cited in Kraay (2004), presents pro-poor growth as a substantial increase in the socio-economic conditions of people in the following potential sources; (i) average incomes; (ii) reduction of poverty to growth in average incomes; and (iii) pattern of lessening poverty rate for growth in relative incomes. However, in the context of this study, the definition of “pro-poor growth” provided by the United Nations (2000) as development that is beneficiary to the poor by providing them opportunities to enhance their social and economic conditions is adopted.

**Who are Youths?** The meaning of youth has been explained by several definitions. For instance, Nigeria’s National Youth Development Policy (2001) defines youths as persons within the age bracket 18 years to 35 years who are citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Similarly, the United Nations (2002) defines youths as people between 15 and 24 years of age. More so, Onuekwusi and Effiong (2002) described youth as a particular age in life which starts from the end of childhood and the beginning of entry into the realm of work. Ashing (2009) also viewed youths as a social category or group with common needs, interests, and characteristics, and who are affected by the same societal institutions and rules. Consequently, youths can be regarded as an indispensable resource which any country that desires to achieve meaningful socio-economic development must utilize (Laogun, 2002). This is because they form the engine room of the labour force; they are energetic and talented. Therefore, a reasonable number of youths must be adequately trained and educated in order to reduce the poverty and unemployment rates in Nigeria and other developing countries.

**What is Youth Unemployment?** Youth unemployment is a phenomenon in which people of working age with at least the minimum potentials to engage in work activities are not able to secure job opportunities. Fajana (2000) described youth unemployment as a phenomenon whereby individuals who are eager to work are unable to find suitable paid employment. Thus, youth unemployment denotes a state of a lack of jobs or opportunities to be gainfully engaged in socio-economic activities through which a steady income can be earned or secured. Youth unemployment is more pervasive in developing countries, including Nigeria. Statistically, Aganga (2010) and Ogunmade (2013) reported that Nigeria’s unemployment rate moved from

11.9% in 2005 to 19.7% in 2009, and over 37% in 2013, while the recent report shows that Nigeria's unemployment rate is still on the high side (see National Bureau of Statistics, 2016). Without overemphasizing the condition of unemployment in Nigeria, an avalanche of studies have substantiated this assertion by reporting that structural factors (such as political instability, policy inconsistency, corruption, income inequality) and institutional factors (such as poor industrial growth and manpower planning, disequilibrium between labour market demand and job-seekers' employability skills, and low technology) are causal factors that connect to youth unemployment and poverty rate in Nigeria (Muhammad, Oye and Inuwa, 2011; Aiyedogbon and Ohwofasa, 2012; Shadare and Elegbede, 2012; Adesina, 2013; Uddin and Uddin, 2013 and Oduwole, 2015). The logic behind this assumption is that the more youths are unemployed in any economy, the greater the level of dependency, economic instability, and poverty rate.

**What are Youth Empowerment Programmes (YEPs)?** One of the ways the term, youth empowerment programmes can be understood is to first and foremost define the word 'empowerment'. Empowerment simply means an act or process of changing people's attitude and potentials in a way that they are enabled to positively contribute to developmental processes in their environment. It is also an attempt to discover and re-direct the productive human resources of a given society to gain control over their ambitions or potentials to facilitate improved social well-being and economic condition of the society (McGinty, 2002). In other words, empowerment involves making individuals think, create and use their talents to generate goods and services that will encourage them to improve their own as well as the societal socio-economic status (Rappaport, 1981, cited in Narayan, 2002). With regard to the definitions above, the term YEP, was explained by Chaskin, Brown, Venkatesh, and Vidal (2001) as that empowerment initiative developed for the youths and is being carried out on multiple levels (i.e. individual, organizational and community level) to effect a positive improvement in the societal status quo. Based on this view, youth empowerment programmes may either focus on the people's affective relations and shared values, or be concerned with the processes of participation and engagement in organizational or community development. In the case of Nigeria, there are four main types of youth empowerment;

1. **Economic empowerment:** This is a kind of empowerment programme designed with the aim of enhancing the economic potentials of persons or a group of individuals towards becoming business innovators in a given society. As such, an economic empowerment programme is centered on inculcating entrepreneurship skills in people so that they can develop and manage personal business initiatives in a competitive business environment (Ogbe, 1996). Economic empowerment is an essential tool in the creation of numerous possible opportunities which youths and business-oriented individuals can key into and make profits that would enable them to achieve desirable living conditions.
2. **Production empowerment:** This form of empowerment according to Idachaba (2006) is primarily based on training that is concerned with how an individual or group of

individuals can answer vital economic questions like, what to produce; how to produce and for whom to produce. in order for them to efficiently operate business enterprises. Production empowerment also helps individuals to develop personal business initiatives that depend on the number of resources (capital, material, money, etc.) at their disposal.

3. **Marketing empowerment:** A marketing empowerment programme is basically designed to help people to enhance their marketing skills and strategy. It is a form of empowerment that focuses on how best to advertise and sell the goods and services produced in any economy (Magbagbeola, 2004). Marketing empowerment trains and teaches people on the most proactive methods of convincing the buyers or consumers of goods and services produced in order to retain their patronage for a long period of time. It also exposes individuals to different marketing strategies (such as, effective communication skills, confidence, and self-esteem) that will promote the acceptance of the goods and services they produce.
4. **Skill Development Empowerment:** Just as the name implies, skill development empowerment is a type of empowerment programme that is designed to enable individuals and group to acquire the necessary skills and capabilities to resolve a particular situation. In other words, skill development empowerment entails different creative training and development that provide individuals with the ability to develop basic techniques and measures relevant to their social and economic survival (Ochiagha, 1995). It is a kind of empowerment programme that promotes the spirit of craftsmanship and entrepreneurship among youths and business-oriented individuals in a way that makes them become job creators instead of job seekers. This is due to the fact that skill development empowerment provides both the theoretical and practical aspects of skills, competencies, and attitudes that the learners should acquire in order to survive the occupational trends in the society.

**What is Food Security?** Food security emerged from the idea that an adequate production of agricultural products or commodities will guarantee the sufficient accessibility of food items in the market as well as in the household (Swaminathan, 2001). While sufficient food accessibility (in the markets and households) will invariably reduce the poverty condition in a society. The term ‘food security’ was popularized due to the incidence of the global food crisis in 2009 which subjected close to 1.02 billion people to chronic hunger and undernourishment (FAO, 2009; Ozor, Umannakwe, and Acheampong, 2014). In this direction, therefore, food security can be described as a term used to negate chronic hunger and more extreme famine events in the absence of food availability; and to stress the complexity of food outcomes in varied social, economic, political, and environmental conditions (Essex, 2010). The challenge of food security is also pervasive on the African continent, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa (Global Hunger Index, 2011; FAO, 2010) due to several factors i.e. conflict, population increase, poor infrastructure, a weak agricultural extension system, food price volatility, and poor attitude of

people to agriculture. To substantiate this fact, Ozor, Umunnakwe and Acheampong (2014) in their study reported that approximately 240 million people (i.e. one person out of every four) in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) are chronically food insecure when compared with the data obtained from other regions of the world (Mwichabe, 2014). To buttress this report, Mwichabe (2014); Ozor, Umunnakwe, and Acheampong, (2014) noted that a number of sub-Saharan countries are currently experiencing some improvements in agricultural production partly to the adoption of new agricultural technology and green policy implementation, but their improvements had not led to a desirable increase in productivity. This submission is made based on the social reality in Nigeria where reports gathered from official archives showed that the agricultural sector is expanding and improving on food production, however, there is counter information that showed that the Nigerian government spent NGN98 trillion (\$266 billion) on food importation in just three years (Edoka, Otajele, and Adejo, 2011). Aside from this information, the former minister of Agriculture, Dr. Akinwunmi Adesina, in his analysis, revealed that Nigeria spent about NGN356 billion (\$18 million) on rice importation, in the year 2011 and about NGN217 billion (\$11 million) was also spent on sugar importation in the same year (Asenso-Okyere and Jemanah, 2012). This information perhaps serves as part of the reasons why Briceno-Garmndia (2010) noted that African countries spend between \$30 billion to \$50 billion on food importation annually due to their poor state of social infrastructure and slow developmental process. Just as in other developing countries, the developmental process in Nigeria has been somewhat slow and the resultant effect is the conspicuous spending on food importation, instead of food generation in a nation that is endowed with human resources, a friendly climate and land space suitable for food generation (Edoka, Otajele, and Adejo, 2011; Asenso-Okyere and Jemanah, 2012).

**Food Generation and Youth Engagement in Nigeria** Food generation is a concept used to describe the multiple processes (agricultural, household and manufacturing) involved in the accessibility, availability, production, and utilization of food resources in bringing about desirable human and social development (Akpan, 2010; Muhammad-Lawal and Atte, 2006; Ukeje, 2005). The agricultural stage of food generation includes land clearing, planting of crops, fumigation, weeding, and harvesting as well as the rearing of livestock (Akpan, 2010; Muhammad-Lawal and Atte, 2006). While the household and manufacturing stage deals with the processing, packaging, and distribution of ready-made food products for human consumption (Ukeje, 2005). Nevertheless, some impeding factors have been hindering the food generation process in Nigeria (Chikaire, Osuagwu, Ihenacho, Ejiogu-Okereke, Oguegbuchulam, and Obi, 2012). Principal among these factors is youth attitude towards agriculture. Youth attitude to agricultural activities has been very poor and is among the leading factors militating against food insecurity in Nigeria. Youth's engagement in food generation is therefore paramount to youth empowerment programmes and human capacity building in Nigeria. To emphasize this posture, an academic report published by Ugwoke, Adesope, and Ibe (2005) revealed that children and youths are significant factors in agricultural production. This report is also in tandem with

Fashina and Okunola (2004) who reported in their study on the impact of the agricultural programme on food production in Ondo State that, youths are the main instrument involved in agricultural production activities. It is therefore disheartening to note that the youthful labour force in agricultural activities in Nigeria has dramatically dropped (Chikaire, Osuagwu, Ihenacho, Ejiogu-Okereke, Oguegbuchulam, and Obi, 2012). This reduction is fundamentally attributed to the growing rate of urbanization, migration, globalization, and the lack of a promising policy framework to encourage agriculture (NEEDS, 2004). Commenting on the phenomenon, Ekong (2003) stated that Nigerian rural areas suffered from insufficient farm workers, as the youths who are supposed to assist in agricultural production have migrated to urban areas in search of white collar jobs because they do not believe in the fact that agriculture is a profitable venture (Ekong, 2003; Arokoyo and Auta, 1992). More emphatically, authors like Eremie (2002), Solanke (2004) and Chikaire et al (2012) noted that there is a need for policy redesign and programmes that will encourage Nigerian youths to appreciate agriculture, stay back in the villages where there are resources and make use of these resources in agricultural activities. This will facilitate the desired socio-economic development in Nigeria.

### **Theoretical Exposition**

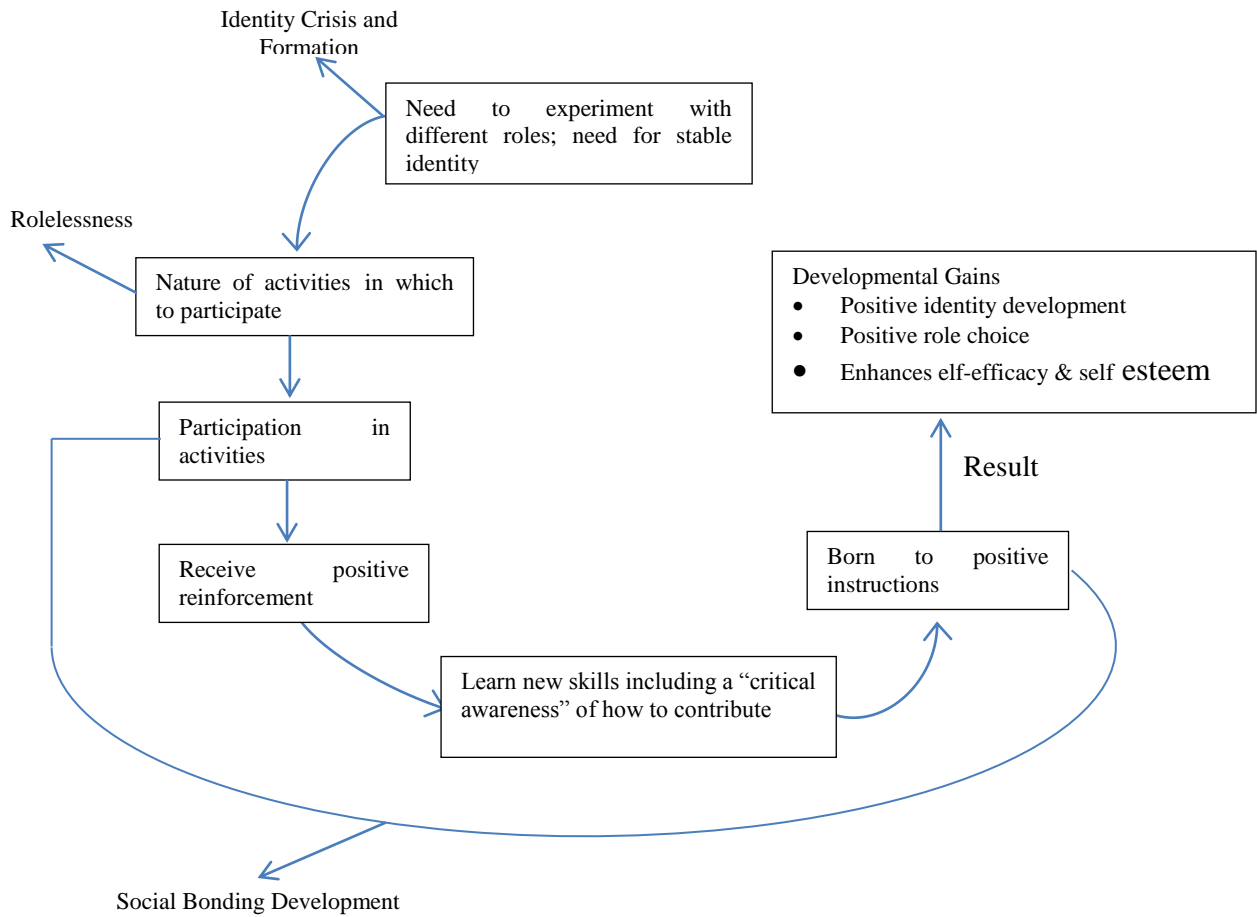
This study employed the adolescence empowerment Cycle model in explaining the link between youth empowerment initiative, poverty reduction, and food generation.

### **The Adolescence Empowerment Cycle**

The Adolescent Empowerment Cycle (AEC) is a model developed by Chinman and Linney (1998) to advance the understanding of the impact of empowerment schemes on adolescent development. The model is built on the premise that empowering adolescents can help to avert or mitigate some of the social hitches facing contemporary societies. According to the proponents of AEC, the empowerment scheme can function as a preventive intervention to a number of problematic behaviours unveiled by adolescents as a result of identity crisis and formation as well as rolelessness (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1966; Chinman and Linney, 1998). Furthermore, the AEC model is a derivative of developmental and social control theories. It postulates that the empowerment programme is a vital tool in the promotion of a positive, socially acceptable development process through adolescence and social bonding (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1966; Hawkin, Catalano and Miller, 1992; Chinman and Linney, 1998). This implies that engaging adolescents in varying social, economic and political activities will reduce the extent to which they get involved in negative social vices (Kurth-Schai, 1998; Nightengale and Wolverson, 1988; Schunk, 1986). To facilitate the understanding of the adolescence empowerment cycle in the context of this study, a diagrammatic illustration is presented below:



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework**



*Source: Model of Adolescent Empowerment Cycle adapted from Chinman and Linney (1998)*

Arising from the diagram above, the introduction of empowerment schemes in contemporary Nigerian society is stimulated by the dire need for a lasting solution to the problem of unemployment and its concomitant social vices. The manifestation of youth unemployment challenges in Oyo State, Nigeria led to the establishment of YES-O scheme which is geared towards engaging unemployed youths in different socio-economic activities and roles (ranging from traffic management, fire service, solid waste management, information, and orientation). This is with a particular consciousness that when youths participate in these positive activities; the issue of identity crisis and formation, as well as the lack of meaningful roles that influence youth involvement in negative behaviours will be resolved. More so, development experts strongly believed that engaging the youths in varying empowerment programmes and initiatives will enable them to learn new skills, ways and manners in which they can contribute meaningfully to the development process and social bond. It is in this direction that this study

investigates youth empowerment initiative as a means to overcoming poverty through the engagement of youths in sustainable food generation within their empowerment cycle.

## Methodology

This study adopts an explanatory design. The population of the study comprises of the members of the YES-O scheme within the six established units; Traffic Management Unit, Information and Orientation Unit, Fire Service Unit, Solid Waste Management Unit, Oyo State Signage Agency as well as the Education and Training Unit in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. The determination of sampling frame was based on the information gathered. The table below presents information on the sampling frame.

## Sampling Frame

Unit	No. of cadets	No. of cadets selected to administer the questionnaire	No. of copies of questionnaire retrieved	Location
Traffic Management Unit	330	66	42	Oyo-State secretariat
Information and Orientation Unit	18	18	18	Oyo-State secretariat
Fire Service Unit	170	34	30	Oyo-State secretariat
Solid Waste Management Unit	530	106	89	Gate, Ibadan
Oyo State Signage Agency	50	50	46	Oyo-State secretariat
Education and Training Unit	No precise figure was given but the Unit has over fifty cadets	26	16	Ibadan North LG
Total		300	241	

A multi-stage sampling technique (consisting of purposive and quota sampling techniques) was used in selecting respondents. The rationale behind using these techniques is that it gives the entire subjects in the study location equal opportunity of being selected or included in the research. It also ensures that the selected sample is adequate and a true representation of the population. Quota or proportionate sampling was used to select respondents, according to the number of cadets in each unit, for questionnaire administration. Thereafter, the purposive sampling method was used to select participants from each unit for the in-depth interview. A total of 300 respondents were selected for the administration of the questionnaire, while 12 participants were purposively selected for the in-depth interview session. The selection of the 12 interviewees was based on their in-depth knowledge about the research topic, willingness to participate in the interview sessions and the ability to provide useful information on the subject matter to the researchers. Participants were interviewed face-to-face at their various duty posts and in their offices. The duration of the interview session was between 20 to 30 minutes. After the introduction of the study objectives, the researchers sought

permission to record the interview, which was granted in each case. The interviewer interacted with the interviewees by asking for more details, examples, and clarifications to buttress their views and positions on each question asked.

## **Instruments**

This study employed two instruments of data collection which are:

- i. **Questionnaire:** This contains a set of questions that aim to collect useful information/data for analysis. It includes both open-ended and close-ended questions to elicit the required information on the subject matter. The participants are not expected to supply their names; hence, there is no provision of space for names. This is done in order to avoid any embarrassment that might lead to bias in their response and also to preserve the anonymity of the respondents. The bio-data collected in the first part of the questionnaire was used for classification. This requires such information as sex, age, marital status, occupation, etc. The primary aim is to highlight the socio-demographic background of the respondents. The second part of the questionnaire relates to the subject matter of the research work. The questions asked focused on the perception of the respondents on youth empowerment initiatives and the role of food generation and production in reducing poverty within their empowerment Cycle.
  
- ii. **In-depth Interview Guide:** This contains unstructured questions relating to the research at hand. Participants were interviewed face-to-face at their various duty posts and in their offices. The duration of the interview session was between 20 to 30 minutes. After the introduction of the study objectives, the researchers sought permission to record the interview, which was granted in each case. The interviewer interacted with the interviewees by asking for more details, examples, and clarifications to buttress their views and positions on each question asked. The interviewer did not guide the interviewees to any type of response on particular variables. Rather, the interview often resembled a conversation between friends, and the questions asked of the interviewee were phrased to fit in with the flow of the interview. In the present study, the questions that informed the interview process are outlined as follows;
  1. How important do you think youth empowerment initiative is to human and social development?
  2. Describe your perception about the YES-O scheme and human capacity building as well as employment creation.
  3. What factors influence the YES-O initiative in impacting relevant innovative skills and knowledge in the Nigerian youth? Give examples.
  4. Describe how your experience and expectation of the YES-O scheme influence the way you perceive and utilize the youth empowerment Cycle in food generation.
  5. What should we know about the need to incorporate food generation activities in the YES-O scheme in order to reduce poverty and unemployment in Oyo State, Nigeria?

## Method of Data Analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data collected through questionnaire administration, while qualitative content analysis was used to present the qualitative data gathered through in-depth interviews.

## Ethical Consideration

Before administering the research instruments to the respondents, all the participants' were guaranteed of complete anonymity and confidentiality. The respondents were also provided with information on the purpose of the study which is to contribute to the body of knowledge. Each participant was at liberty to discontinue participation at any point during the exercise from perceived confidentiality regarding questions believed to infringe on their privacy. The purpose of informed consent is to secure participants' willingness to take part in the study, being aware of the risks and benefits of their participation. Translators were present at each interview to ensure that all questions were clear to the interviewee; because some of the participants were not too familiar with the English Language and the interviews commenced accordingly.

## Data Analysis

### Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The significance of analyzing demographic data in any research study is to reveal the population's characteristics in terms of sex, age, religion, occupation, etc. The information presented in the table below shows the socio-demographic variables of the respondents.

**Table 1 Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Respondents**

Variables	Frequency (n=247)	Percentage
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	141	57.5
Female	104	42.5
<b>Age</b>		
18-20	13	5.3
21-25	49	19.8
26-30	124	50.2
31-35	37	15.0
36 and above	22	9.7
<b>Educational qualification</b>		
Primary School Certificate	11	4.5
Secondary School Certificate	43	17.4
Diploma/NCE	69	27.9
HND/B.Sc	116	47.0
M.Sc	3	1.2
Ph.D	3	1.2
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single	118	47.8
Married	127	51.4

<b>Ethnicity</b>		
Yoruba	236	95.5
Igbo	9	3.6
<b>Religion</b>		
Christian	118	47.8
Muslim	51	20.6
Traditional	6	2.4
<b>Monthly Income</b>		
Less than ₦10,000	215	87.0
₦10,000 - ₦20,000	21	8.5
Above ₦20,000	3	1.2

Source: Field Survey, 2016

The table above presents data on selected socio-demographic profiles of respondents. Based on the responses gathered through the questionnaire, a majority (57.5%) of the respondents were male, while 42.5% were female. This implies that there are more male than female engaged in the YES-O empowerment scheme. This could be a fall out of cultural, political and religious considerations in the participation of female members of society in activities outside the home. Obviously, this kind of situation is pervasive in a patriarchal society, such as Nigeria is. The age distribution of the respondents reveals that 5.3% were within the age-bracket of 15-20yrs; 19.8% of the respondents were within the age-bracket of 21-25yrs, and 50.2% were within the age-bracket of 26-30yrs; 15.0% were within the age-bracket of 31-35yrs, while 9.7% were above the age of 36 yrs. This result indicates that a bulk of the respondents are adults within the active working age-bracket. The implication of this is that majority of the respondents are still very energetic to engage in any productive activity, hence, if properly empowered, can drive home the desirable socio-economic growth and development in Nigeria.

More so, the educational status of the respondents showed that most of the respondents were sufficiently literate; having one form of educational qualification or the other. Thus, majority of the respondents have access to formal education and possess high educational qualification which ultimately indicates that there is a high literacy level among the respondents. This result also reflects and substantiates the assertion that there is a significant level of literacy among the residents of Oyo State, Nigeria (Salim, 2002). The marital status of the respondents reveals that 48.2% of respondents were single, while 51.8% were married. This points to the fact that majority of the YES-O cadets are married with extended family responsibilities which require that they have multiple streams of income. As expected, the majority of the respondents are of Yoruba extraction, representing about 95.5% of the sampled population; this is because Ibadan is predominantly inhabited by the Yoruba. Moreover, the scheme was state-oriented project which would largely benefit indigenes of the state. As regards religious affinity, the majority of the respondents belong to the two dominant religions in Nigeria; with Christians

recording the highest percentage (76.5%), followed by Muslims (20.6%) and Traditionalists (2.4%). The reason for the disparity in the religious composition cannot be adduced by the study. Perhaps, Christians are better cut out for white-collar jobs, a fall out of the Colonial legacy which gave room for converts of this religion to be trained in literacy and clerical work for the civil service. Further study can prove this as this was not part of the focus of the study. In addition, the monthly income of the respondents shows that 87.0% earn less than ₦10,000 (28 USD) monthly; 8.5% earn between ₦10,000 and ₦20,000 (from 28 to 56 USD) monthly; and 1.2% earn above ₦20,000 (56 USD) monthly. Since the report revealed that a large percentage of the respondents earn less than ₦10,000 (28 USD), it is clear that a good number of them depend mainly on the stipends received from the government and, therefore, have no other private engagement that can earn them additional income.

## Results

The responses of the respondents, in accordance with the stated research objectives, were presented below using regression and content analysis.

### Quantitative Data Analysis

**Objective One:** The impact of the YES-O scheme on self-reliance among youths in Oyo State

**Table 2: Summary of Regression**

R= .585 <sup>a</sup> R Square= .342 Adjusted R square=.107 Standard Error=1.122						
ANOVA						
	Sum of Squares	Degree of freedom	Mean Square	F	P	Remarks
Regression	22.173	5	31.411	19.210	.000	*
Residual	75.627	239	1.259			
Total	97.800	244				

Significant (p<0.05\*)

Mode 1	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standard coefficients	T	Sig	Remarks
	B	Std. Error	Beta		Std. Error	
(Constant)	3.063	1.312		2.335	.035	*
Trainers direction and instruction	.172	.250	.188	.689	.002	*
Course contents	.154	.306	-.112	-.354	.038	*
On-the-job and career training	.302	.267	.417	1.132	.016	*

Training methodologies and materials	.328	.300	.346	1.093	.003	*
Training facilities and equipment	-.355	.267	-.375	-1.330	.005	*

Source: Field Survey

The result in table 2 above shows the impact of the YES-O scheme on youths' self-reliance in Oyo State, Nigeria. The result reveals the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) of 0.342, which implies that the YES-O scheme accounted for 34.2% of the total variance in achieving youths' self-reliance in Oyo State, Nigeria. The table also shows the degree of freedom (Df) of 5; F-statistic of 19.210 and the p-value of 0.000, which implies that the combined variables of the YES-O scheme have a significant influence on the self-reliance of youths in Oyo State, Nigeria. Furthermore, to determine the extent of the impact of the variables of the YES-O scheme in achieving self-reliance among youths in Oyo State, Nigeria, training (on-the-job and career) programmes (with a standard coefficient of 0.417) exerts greater influence on youths' self-reliance, than the efficiency of training facilities and equipment (with a standardized coefficient of -.375).

**Objective Two:** The influence of incorporating food generation activities in the YES-O scheme on poverty reduction in Oyo State, Nigeria

**Table 3 Summary of Regression**

R= .533 <sup>a</sup> R Square= .284 Adjusted R square=.093 Standard Error=.947						
ANOVA						
	Sum of Squares	Degree of freedom	Mean Square	F	P	Remarks
Regression	30.337	3	12.191	11.921	.000	*
Residual	65.463	241	.889			
Total	95.800	244				

Significant (p<0.05 \*)

Mode 1	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standard coefficients	T	Sig	Remarks
	B	Std. Error	Beta		Std. Error	
(Constant)	3.693	1.120		.868	.009	*
Vocational and technical empowerment	.576	.253	.304	2.274	.038	
Farming activities and animal husbandry	.973	.193	.636	1.112	.024	*
Administrative and entrepreneurial skill empowerment	.303	.273	.097	.393	.001	*

Source: Field Survey

The information in table 3 above reveals the influence of food generation activities in poverty reduction in Oyo State, Nigeria. The result reveals the coefficient of determination, ( $R^2$ ) of 0.284 which implies that food generation activities accounted for 28.4% of the total variance in poverty reduction in Oyo State, Nigeria. The table also shows the degree of freedom (Df) of 3; F-statistic of 11.921 and the p-value of 0.000, which implies that the combined variables of food generation activities have a significant influence on poverty reduction in Oyo State, Nigeria. Furthermore, to determine the extent of the influence of food generation activities on poverty reduction in Oyo State, Nigeria, farming and animal husbandry (with a standard coefficient of 0.636) exerts greater influence on poverty reduction, than vocational and technical empowerment (with a standardized coefficient of 0.304).

### **Qualitative Data Analysis**

The analysis of the qualitative data also reveals that the YES-O scheme has contributed to youths' self-reliance, food generation as well as poverty reduction in Oyo State, Nigeria. To debunk this submission, an interviewee during the in-depth interview session stated that;

*One of the ways by which this programme has been preparing me to be self-reliant with tradable skills is in the line of ICT. Moreover, the world has become a global village and everyone is fast becoming IT complaint, including private organizations. I hope to have a private business centre of my own after the completion of my training. Based on the computer training offered to us by the ministry of sports development, I think am equipped enough to manage private business along this line (IDI/Respondents/2016).*

Another female interviewee has this to report on the preference of small-scale retailing business;

*As a beneficiary of the scheme, I have acquired some entrepreneurial skills through a series of seminars and symposium [sic] organized by the management of the scheme. With these skills, I can set up a business that entails the production of household commodities like soap, cream, beads etc... Honestly speaking, I have learned how to start a business with little capital and how to grow the business over time taking advantage of the opportunities around me. Hopefully, this programme is preparing me to be self-reliant after the completion of the training (IDI/Respondents/2016).*

The above responses significantly support the finding presented by the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (NEEDS) report of 2004 in which it was affirmed that vocational skills' training is receiving greater attention as many centres have been established. However, the NEEDS report claimed that many of the responses to poverty reduction appeared to be ad-hoc, uncoordinated and more or less fire brigade. The reason for



this scenario was succinctly revealed by one of the interviewees during the in-depth interview session, who said:

*The provision of training programmes for YES-O cadets is one of the best things that we have experienced and benefitted immensely from, however, considering the state of the country now, food production and generation is the most required business that can save the nation from poverty and the dwindling economic condition. Unfortunately, the majority of the youth nowadays are not paying attention to this reality and the repercussion can be seen from the high cost of food ingredients in the market... The belief that farming and animal rearing is a dirty job or business meant for uneducated persons seem to be changing because I personally appreciate the training on farming and animal husbandry of the scheme. However, it would be so good if more attention is given towards encouraging farming activities among the members of the YES-O scheme in recent times (IDI/Respondents/2016).*

Another interviewee corroborates the above response by affirming that:

*I am most grateful to God for what the programme is enabling me to do in my own private engagement from the training on farming and animal husbandry acquired from this programme. I have been able to create an additional source of income through snail business which I learned in this programme. It is true that the money which government pays us at the end of the month is very little but the training programmes which are provided by the scheme can generate more than what we earn monthly if we put the knowledge into practice (IDI/Respondents/2016).*

In contrast to the view above, an interviewee stated that:

*I have not been engaging in any personal business since I started this; though before this programme started, I ran a private business centre with my own brother. But since I have been involved in this programme, I see no reason for it. My hope is that someday, I will be absorbed into the civil service by this government (IDI/Respondents/2016).*

Another interviewee responded on a different note:

*I don't have any personal business of my own. And I am not even thinking of owning one for now until I'm through with this wahala (problem, alluding to the stress of the programme). May God help us to complete it successfully and start something meaningful! This is my prayer. The programme has not prepared me in any sense with a tradable skill for post-engagement life (IDI/Respondents/2016).*

Investigating the reason why some of the YES-O cadets are not engaging in private business or even practice the knowledge acquired from the training programmes as affirmed by some of the interviewees, an interviewee frankly affirmed that:

*I think of having a private business of my own. But financial support is what is stopping me. Money is not forthcoming from any source, even though one has acquired skills that could make one be self-reliant and independent following the training from this scheme. If the start-up capital is in place, I, as a person, would not hesitate to start a business of my own (IDI/Respondents/2016).*

Another interviewee expressed a different viewpoint, she said:

*To my own understanding, this scheme has not prepared us for any personal or private business. Moreover, no time is set aside for such because you have to come to this place (work) every day. I have no time enough [sic] to engage in the personal business of my own. I have no doubt that in certain ministries they have a training programme for the cadets there; but in my unit (ministry of environment) we are left out of this. For this reason, I do not think it has prepared me to set up any business for post-training life (IDI/Respondents/2016).*

Following the above responses, one of the interviewees affirmed that:

*... We are not in any way being trained to be self-reliant. No programme has been going on in my unit in terms of preparing us for post-engagement. As a matter of fact, many of us are only hoping that there would be an opportunity to get into the civil service through this scheme. This is the reason why we have been waiting, still around, for the last three years (IDI/Respondents/2016).*

Similarly, another interviewee stated that:

*There has not been any training in my unit. We only come here every day and laze around waiting for the peanuts which come to us monthly as allowance. In other words, I have not benefited in terms of skill acquisition from my participation in this programme. As a result, I only hope to be absorbed into the civil service system at the end of my training (IDI/Respondents/2016).*

The data presented above shows that the training programmes (vocational and entrepreneurial training) do not cut across all units in the scheme. Hence, a number of the beneficiaries may not acquire tradable skills after they complete the programme. This is not necessarily the case in all units, as previously expressed by one of the interviewees, but this factor may be a major reason why a good number of them did not engage in personal business and are not thinking of doing this even after the completion of their training. However, as much as the number of those who express displeasure about the training programmes designed to help

the YES-O cadets in post-engagement period is significant; there is a dire need for value reorientation towards farming and animal husbandry, which has been said to be the solution to poverty and economic recession in the country. This fact is of immense relevance to the majority of Nigerian youths who are still desperate to get white collar jobs.

Furthermore, another deduction that can be drawn from the finding is that the major reason for involving youths in farming activities or animal husbandry is to fight against poverty and unemployment rate in Nigeria, as affirmed by the respondents. This is especially true because youths' engagement in food production will create an alternative source of income, employment generation, socio-economic opportunities, industrialization, exportation and increase government revenue which will ultimately translate to development. To further investigate the foregoing discourse on food generation and poverty reduction in Nigeria, an interviewee revealed that:

*One of the major factors contributing to the poverty rate in Nigeria is an inadequate flow of food ingredients among the general populace. Food is very essential for the survival and development of human beings. Nobody can exist without food. Even though it was written in the Bible that man must not live by bread alone, it still substantiates the certainty that without food, man cannot live. The role of food in reducing poverty cannot be underestimated because once a person is able to eat three times daily s/he is less concerned with any other things in this world. I personally have no doubt that food production will reduce poverty in Nigeria (IDI/Respondents/2016).*

Similarly, another interviewee submitted that:

*Yes, food production will significantly address the challenge of poverty in Nigeria. The reason for poverty in Nigeria is because the majority of the population do not have access to adequate food supply. Take me, for instance, the main reason why I decided to partake in the YES-O scheme is to ensure that I have food on my table. This is because without food life becomes very difficult and discouraging to human beings. Inability to access food three-times daily is a true reflection of poverty. That is, poverty will deny someone access to food and other basic needs of life. Thus, once the issue of food is addressed I strongly believe that poverty will reduce drastically and there will be development in Nigeria (IDI/Respondents/2016).*

In an attempt to identify the various factors affecting food production in Nigeria, an interviewee stated that:

*Sincerely speaking, food production in Nigeria has been hindered by [sic] numerous factors such as political corruption, lack of modern agricultural equipment, lack of funds and farm inputs, poor attitude towards agriculture, overdependence on crude-oil, importation, and so on. Not until these factors are resolved, food production in Nigeria will continue to be trivial (IDI/Respondents/2016).*

Likewise, another interviewee states:

*To a large extent, factors such as a preference for foreign-made products, market instability, weak industrialization, insecurity, inadequate budget allocation, and poor storage facilities influence food production in Nigeria. I can bet with anything that if these factors are worked upon, there will be a positive improvement in food production level in Nigeria (IDI/Respondents/2016).*

In order to enhance the food production level in Nigeria, the majority of the interviewees affirmed that:

*Yes. It is a good initiative and majority of us are in support of the view that YES-O cadets should engage in farming or animal husbandry as a source of food generation during and after the empowerment Cycle. Majority of us are graduates with a lot of potentials that can be utilized to enhance the food production level in Nigeria. We believe that engaging in farming or animal husbandry will support the government in generating more revenue and human capacity building for national development (IDI/Respondents/2016).*

It could be strongly inferred from the responses above that food security is a critical factor in the socio-economic development of Nigeria. Most of the developmental challenges facing Nigeria can be strategically addressed if food security is achieved. Hence, youth empowerment initiatives that involve food generation (farming activities or animal husbandry) activities will definitely bring about a reduction in poverty and unemployment rate in Nigeria.

## **Discussion of Findings**

The study examines youth empowerment initiatives towards food generation and pro-poor growth in Oyo State, Nigeria. The study has shown that youth empowerment initiative is an antidote to the problem of youth unemployment, poverty and crime reduction in Nigeria. The finding support the works of Okafor (2011), Muhammad, Oye and Inuwa (2011), Aiyedogbon and Ohwofasa (2012), Shadare and Elegbede (2012), Adesina (2013), Uddin and Uddin (2013) and Oduwole (2015), who reported that youth empowerment schemes will significantly moderate unemployment rate as well as crime occurrences in Nigeria. Also, the finding tallies with the adolescent empowerment cycle model which postulates that youth empowerment initiatives assist in developing a process of social bonding that connect youths to positive societal institutions through action, skill development, and reinforcement.

Furthermore, the study showed that youth empowerment initiatives like small-scale retailing, crop and animal farming, artisanship, information and communication technology help to engage youths for productive activities which in turn generate employment opportunities for them and enhance their self-efficacy and self-esteem. This finding supports Oviawe (2010), who reported that the provision of the right skills to the youths will help them tackle the problem of unemployment and live a more prosperous life. The finding also agrees with Chinedum (2006),

who submitted that empowerment initiatives which are aimed at promoting farming activities and animal husbandry in Nigeria will encourage graduates, non-graduates and school leavers to create employment in the agricultural sector. In the same way, the finding substantiates the views of McGinty (2002) and Rappaport (1981) on empowerment, who observed that empowerment involves making individuals think, create and use their talents to produce goods and services that will help them improve socially and economically.

The study also revealed clearly that there are certain factors affecting the response to training and training outcomes among the respondents which might hinder them from utilizing or practicing the knowledge acquired from the scheme after the empowerment Cycle. The finding was in tandem with Mapila et al., (2011) who reported that an evaluation on training satisfaction in terms of response to training and training outcomes is closely linked with enhancing a lively outcome after the empowerment scheme. The finding also resonates with the outcome of the study conducted by Bennel (2010) who revealed that factors such as inadequate training facilities, illiteracy, lack of funds, poor programme content and politics, among others could hinder the effectiveness of an empowerment scheme. On the issue of programme content, this study revealed that incorporating farming activities and animal husbandry into youth empowerment schemes will promote food generation and employment opportunities in Nigeria. The finding corroborates Aiyedogbon and Ohwofasa (2014) who noted that an attempt to encourage a positive attitude to domestic food production (that provides a source of income to the poor) among Nigerians will drastically reduce unemployment and poverty rate. In addition, the finding of the study revealed that youth engagement in food generation will significantly reduce unemployment and poverty rate in Nigeria. This finding upholds the view of Ugwoke, Adesope and Ibe (2005) that children and youth contribute significantly to agricultural activities in most developing countries. It also ties in perfectly with Fashina and Okunola (2004), who reported that the impact of the agricultural programme on food production in Ondo State, Nigeria was achieved through youth involvement in agricultural activities.

## **Conclusion**

From the foregoing, it is obvious that youth empowerment initiative is a prerequisite factor in curbing the menace of unemployment and poverty rate in Nigeria. This is inherently true in as much as youth empowerment initiatives are designed to engage the youth population in positive socio-economic activities that can translate to national development and inclusive growth. The YES-O scheme is a training project that focused on youths. The YES-O scheme involves the creation of temporary job opportunities in the areas of public works, emergency services, traffic management, education, and training, waste management and environmental services in Oyo State, Nigeria. It also includes vocational and entrepreneurial training programmes to equip the youths with the necessary skills that would enable them to create jobs for themselves and become economically self-reliant. While the efforts of the Oyo State government in initiating the YES-O scheme is geared towards empowering youths to be skillful and self-reliant, a study on past efforts revealed that the outcome of the scheme on the beneficiaries had been undermined

by factors like poor programme implementation, boring programme content and ill-preparation of the beneficiaries for the training. However, the study examined the two research objectives which are to; (1) examine the role of the YES-O scheme in fostering self-reliance among unemployed youths in Oyo State, Nigeria; and (2) the relevance of incorporating food generation activities in the YES-O scheme on poverty reduction in Oyo State, Nigeria. The findings of the study revealed that one sustainable way of empowering Nigerian youths in the context of reducing unemployment and poverty rate is to engage them in food generation activities. Such an empowerment programme will not only quench unemployment issues but will also promote sustainable socio-economic development.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are provided to aid the provision of an effective youth empowerment scheme in Nigeria. First, there is a need for the establishment of more vocational and entrepreneurial training centres across the entire states of the federation, with efficient equipment to equip trainees with tradable, creative and working skills. This will increase the level of the participation and engagement of youths in empowerment programmes as well as the extent to which youth unemployment, poverty other associated social problems would be addressed. It will also increase the numbers of creative and innovative individuals available for the realization of sustainable socio-economic development in Nigeria. Second, there is a dire need for youths' value re-orientation towards farming activities and animal husbandry, as a source of employment generation and as a process of developing a stable and positive social identity among the youths. To be able to achieve this, the government must ensure that there is adequate provision of facilities, funds, information, policies and other necessary factors of production for people (especially youth) who engage in agricultural activities and businesses in Nigeria, so as to enable them to nurture and grow their businesses productively. Third, there is a need for the inclusion of training in farming and animal husbandry in the themes or contents of the youth empowerment programme in Nigeria. An empowerment initiative that provides analytical, intellectual and practical information on how to develop a workable and successful ideology on agricultural activities will change the mindset of many Nigerian youths towards venturing into food generation activities, which can serve as the antidote to current social problems (i.e. unemployment, poverty, and chronic food security) in Nigeria. Finally, there is a need for the government and non-governmental organizations to collaborate in the funding and provision of training facilities in youth empowerment centres in Nigeria. This will help to resolve some of the challenges facing trainers and trainees in ensuring that youth empowerment programmes produce positive and desirable outcomes in the trainees.

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