

ENGAGING YOUTH IN COMMUNITY EDUCATION PROGRAMMES FOR PEACE AND FOOD SECURITY: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore how engaging youths in community education programmes for Peace and Food Security in the Ikeduru and Mbaitolu Local Government Areas of Imo State. A descriptive survey design was employed for the research. The participants' pool included 378 youths directly active in peace or food security initiatives were chosen using the purposive sample technique across various communities in the three local government areas. Population of the study consists of 3,782 young people from the chosen communities. 1,967 male participants represented 52% of the total population, while 1815 female participants represented 48% of the total population, were selected from the Ikeduru, Mbaitolu, and Owerri Municipal local government areas, which are located within the state's three senatorial districts. The sample size was chosen using Taro Yamen's scientific method. The study was structured around two research questions and utilized a validated questionnaire consisting of 10 items, titled "Engaging Youth in Community Education Programmes for Peace and Food Security Opportunities and Challenges" (EYCEPPFS)" served as the study tool for data collection. The structure of the instrument was highly disputed (1), disagreed (2), agreed (3), and strongly agree (4). which had a reliability coefficient of 0.74. The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation scores. The findings indicated that participants believe that Community education that promote peace are more effective when youth are involved, Youth involvement in community initiatives has a positive effect on local food security while more sustainable results are produced when young people participate in peace and food security initiatives. Community members appreciate the efforts made by young people to initiate promoting food security and peace. Youth participation in community initiatives fosters cooperation and trust among members in Imo State. Findings also indicated that participants believe that youths lack sufficient information and outreach about available peace and food security programmes, and financial costs associated with participation in the programme.

Keywords: youths, community education, peace and food security programs, opportunities, challenges

Introduction

Since young people have the capacity to bring about long-lasting change in their communities, their contribution to promoting peace and food security has recently received international recognition (United Nations, 2018). Due to high rates of youth unemployment, poverty, and political instability, Imo State, which is in southeast Nigeria, faces significant obstacles in achieving peace and ensuring food security (Food and Agriculture Organisation [FAO], 2019). Because of these issues, young people must be actively involved in community education initiatives that promote harmonious coexistence and improve food security.

Young people's role in fostering peace and food security has lately gained international recognition due to their ability to effect permanent change in their communities (United Nations, 2018). Imo State, located in southeast Nigeria, faces major challenges in establishing peace and guaranteeing food security because of high rates of youth unemployment, poverty, and political instability (Food and Agriculture Organisation [FAO], 2019). These problems necessitate the active participation of youth in community education programmes that enhance food security and foster peaceful cohabitation.

Involving youth in peace-building projects is crucial, according to international organisations like the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which contends that young people are not only beneficiaries but also crucial contributors to peace (UNDP, 2016). In areas like Imo State, where more than 60% of the

population depends on agriculture for a living, the FAO states that engaging youth in agriculture and food security programmes is especially important (FAO, 2020). However, systemic obstacles such as inadequate educational opportunities, lack of access to resources, and sociocultural prejudices that frequently exclude young voices from decision-making processes make it difficult for young people to participate in such projects (International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2021).

Although youth make up a sizeable section of the population in Nigeria, current statistics show that a lack of institutional support and resources hinders their participation in community initiatives (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2022). Notwithstanding these obstacles, Imo State has seen encouraging indications of youth-led projects that highlight the potential benefits of youth participation. To construct sustainable food systems and lessen local disputes, for instance, local youth organisations have participated in peace-building workshops and agricultural cooperatives (UNICEF, 2021). However, the scalability and efficacy of these programmes are constrained by the absence of infrastructure and regular support.

This study examines the advantages and disadvantages of including young people in community education initiatives in light of Imo State's complicated sociopolitical environment and the pressing need for long-term peace and food security. This study looks at current initiatives and learns from successful case studies to find ways to increase youth involvement and support broader development objectives. This is in

response to international organisations such as the United Nations and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) calling for youth involvement to be a key component of peace and food security policies (United Nations, 2018; FAO, 2019).

Statement of problem

Food hunger, sociopolitical instability, and youth unemployment remain major risks to peace and sustainable development in Imo State, Nigeria. Despite making up a significant fraction of the population, youth are frequently excluded from community-based programmes that attempt to address these issues. Although young people have a lot of potential to be change agents, a number of obstacles prevent them from participating in community education programmes centred on food security and peace, such as limited educational opportunities, insufficient access to resources, and systemic sociocultural biases that keep them out of decision-making processes on food security and peace. In addition to undermining the potential benefit of community education projects, Imo State's ineffective youth participation feeds the cycle of instability and poverty. Current programmes frequently overlook the creative ideas and methods that young people can provide because they do not sufficiently take into account their viewpoints or create opportunities for their meaningful participation. In order to find ways to get beyond these obstacles and increase youth involvement, this study aims to investigate the opportunities and difficulties of integrating young people in community education initiatives that promote peace and increase food security.

Research Objectives

The following goals are intended to be addressed by this study:

In order to achieve these goals, the study will investigate the following objectives:

1. To evaluate how youth participation affect the efficacy and results of community education initiatives pertaining to food security and peace building.
2. To determine the main challenges and barriers that young people face when attempting to engage in these programmes, and how do these challenges affect their participation.

Research Questions

In order to achieve these goals, the study will investigate the following queries:

1. How does youth participation affect the efficacy and results of community education initiatives pertaining to food security and peace building?
2. What are the main challenges and barriers that young people face when attempting to engage in these programmes, and how do these challenges affect their participation?

Clarification of Concepts

Youth

Youth are often defined as individuals aged 18 to 40, though this varies by culture and context (2015).

Community

Nandi and Ugochukwu (2016) describe a community as individuals living in a specific area with shared culture, beliefs, and values. This paper adopts this as its working definition, which refers to a population living in a defined area with a shared culture and consistent belief and value systems.

Education

Education traditionally involves character development and knowledge acquisition. Okoro (2006) expands this to include skill acquisition for problem-solving. Nnadi and Ugochukwu (2016) align with Plato's view,

emphasising intellectual, moral, and physical development.

Concepts of Community Education

Community education enables lifelong learning and active participation in society (Encyclopaedia Wikipedia, 2019). Ezimah (as cited in Kelechi & Blaise, 2019) defines it as increasing awareness, knowledge, and skills for a community's growth. It prioritises adult learners and aims to prepare individuals for life beyond financial gain.

Objectives of Community Education

Community education fosters democracy, equality, economic growth, and social progress (Ministry of Education and Research, Swedish Government, 2019). Key objectives include:

- Lifelong learning: Ensuring education is accessible to all.
- Supporting formal education: Encouraging community involvement in learning.
- Promoting social cohesion: Fostering integration and personal growth (Westonka Public Schools, 2019).

Concept of Peace

Peace is defined as freedom from war and violence, enabling harmonious coexistence (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). Rummel (2019) argues that even an unjust peace is preferable to a just war, highlighting peace as a fundamental human value. Peace involves societal harmony and the absence of hostility and violence, with no conflicts between individuals or groups. It reflects a state where different social groups coexist peacefully without conflict or violence.

Food Security

Food security ensures consistent access to safe, nutritious food for a healthy life (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, & WHO, 2022). It depends on agricultural productivity,

economic policies, and environmental factors.

Methodology

The investigation was conducted using a descriptive survey design. The goal of

Presentation of Data

descriptive survey studies is to gather information on a community and provide a systematic description of its facts, traits, or features (Nworgu, 2015) population of the study consists of 3,782 young people from the chosen communities. 1,967 male participants, representing 52% of the total population, while 1815 female participants, representing 48% of the total population, were selected from the Ikeduru, Mbaitolu, and Owerri Municipal local government areas, which are located within the state's three senatorial districts. The sample size was chosen using Taro Yamen's scientific method, the study's sample size is 378. In Imo State, Ikeduru, Mbaitolu, and Owerri Municipal Local Government Areas, youth that are directly active in peace or food security initiatives were chosen using the purposive sample technique. With a reliability index of 0.74 percent, the validated 10-item questionnaire "Engaging Youth in Community Education Programmes for Peace and Food Security: Opportunities and Challenges" (EYCEPPFS)" served as the study tool for data collection. The structure of the instrument was highly disputed (1), disagreed (2), agreed (3), and strongly agreed (4). To address the study issues, the mean and grand mean were used in the data analysis. Items with a criterion mean of 2.5 were accepted, whereas those with a mean of less than 2.50 were discarded

Research Question 1: How does youth participation affect the efficacy and results of community education initiatives pertaining to food security and peace building?

Table 1.1 mean responses of respondents on youth participation affect the efficacy and results of community education initiatives pertaining to food security and peace building

S/N	Statements	SA	A	D	SD		Grand	Mean		
1.	Community education that promotes peace are more effective when youths are involved	4 175	3 95	2 73	1 35	N 378	Total 11661		Std 0.93	Decision Accepted
2.	Youths involvement in community education has a positive effect on local food security.	180	110	60	28	378	1198	3.17	0.99	Accepted
3.	More sustainable results are produced when young people participate in peace and food security initiatives.	150	120	30	78	378	1098	2.90	0.82	Accepted
4.	Community members appreciate the efforts made by young people to initiatives promoting food security and peace.	175	95	73	35	378	1166	3.08	0.93	Accepted
5.	Youths participation in community initiatives foster cooperation and trust among neighbors	140	110	83	90	378	1058	2.79	0.55	Accepted
	Grand Mean								2.98	Accepted

Table 1.1: Mean Responses of Respondents on Youth Participation Affecting the Efficacy and Results of Community Education Initiatives Pertaining to Food Security and Peace building

The findings in Table 1.1 indicate that the mean responses of participants for items 1–5 range from 2.79 to 3.17, with standard deviations between 0.55 and 0.99 from respondents. All mean responses exceed the criterion mean of 2.50, suggesting that community education programmes aimed at promoting peace are more effective when youths are involved.

Additionally, the analysis of the first research question revealed a grand mean of 2.98, which surpasses the criterion mean of 2.50. This indicates that participants believe that community projects promoting peace are more effective when youths are involved.

Youth involvement in community initiatives has a positive effect on local food security, while more sustainable results are produced when young people participate in peace and food security initiatives. Community members appreciate the efforts made by young people in promoting food security and peace. Furthermore, youth participation in community initiatives fosters cooperation and trust among members in Imo State. Research Question 2: What are the main challenges and barriers that young people face when attempting to engage in these programmes, and how do these challenges affect their participation?

	Statements	SA	A	D	SD	N	Total	(X)	Std	Decision
6	Young people lacks sufficient information and our reach about available peace food security programmes	145	80	63	90	378	1036	2.74	0.51	Accepted
7.	Financial costs association with programme participation prevents young people from joining	165	110	35	50	378	1146	3.03	0.90	Accepted
8.	Young people experience resistance from their family or community when attempting to join these programmes.	160	95	68	55	378	1116	2.95	0.93	Accepted
9.	Financial costs associated with programme, programme participation prevents young people from joining	180	100	70	28	378	1188	3.14	0.98	Accepted
10	Young people are not fully aware of the persona or community benefits of participating in peace and food security programmes.	174	120	69	15	378	1209	3.20	0.96	Accepted

Table 2.2: Mean Responses of Respondents on the Main Challenges and Barriers That Young People Face When Attempting to Engage in These Programmes, and How These Challenges Affect Their Participation

The findings in Table 2.2 indicate that the mean responses of participants for items 6–10 range from 2.74 to 3.20, with standard deviations between 0.51 and 0.98 from respondents. All mean responses exceed the criterion mean of 2.50, suggesting that young people encounter challenges and barriers when attempting to engage in community education programmes, which affect their participation.

Additionally, the analysis of the second research question revealed a grand mean of 3.04, which surpasses the criterion mean of 2.50. This indicates that participants believe that:

- Youths lack sufficient information and outreach about available peace and food security programmes.
- Financial costs associated with participation in these programmes prevent youths from joining.
- Youths experience resistance from their family or community when attempting to join these programmes.
- Young people are not fully aware of the personal or community benefits of participating in peace and food security programmes.

Discussion of Findings

Findings indicate strong support for youth participation in community peace and food security initiatives, with a grand mean of 2.98. This aligns with Chigbu and Sloan (2020), who highlight youth contributions to

the effectiveness of such programmes through creativity and innovation. In areas like Imo State, their active involvement fosters sustainability and social cohesion.

McEvoy-Levy (2019) emphasises that youth-led initiatives enhance community trust and cooperation. Such projects are seen as neutral and community-focused, promoting collaboration. Similarly, Raja and Ray (2020) assert that food security programmes thrive with youth participation due to their adaptability and willingness to embrace sustainable practices.

However, young people face significant barriers, including limited outreach, financial constraints, and lack of community support (Kuznetsova & Mikheeva, 2021). Kalinda et al. (2024) find that high participation costs disproportionately affect low-income youths, reducing enrolment in community programmes. Ochanda and Wafula (2024) further note that family and community resistance discourages youth engagement. Additionally, Mrema (2024) highlights that many young people remain unaware of the personal and societal benefits of participation. Addressing these barriers is crucial for enhancing youth involvement in peace and food security initiatives (Mahanayak, 2024).

Conclusion

Youth participation is vital for the success of community education programmes on peace and food security. Their engagement fosters innovation, sustainability, and social cohesion. However, challenges such as financial constraints, limited information, and community resistance hinder their involvement. Addressing these issues through targeted strategies is essential.

Recommendations

1. Improve programme outreach and visibility by adapting

- programme schedules to suit youth needs.
2. Provide financial support to enhance accessibility as well as mentorship and advocacy for sustained youth involvement.

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