# Collaborative Governance and Sustainable Youth Empowerment in Lagos and Osun States, Nigeria

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## ABSTRACT

Youth empowerment in Nigeria continues to be constrained by limited access to learning opportunities, skills acquisition, employment, entrepreneurial financing, leadership inclusion, and democratic participation, particularly within fragmented subnational governance systems. When institutionalised effectively, collaboration among pertinent stakeholders provides a structured mechanism through which youth empowerment initiatives can be planned, financed, and sustained. This study is grounded in collaborative governance theory to examine how institutionalised stakeholder engagement shapes youth empowerment outcomes at the subnational level. Youth empowerment is conceptualised through empowerment theory as a multidimensional expansion of economic, social, and political agency, while transformative governance provides a normative lens for assessing the sustainability and institutional embeddedness of these outcomes.

The study adopted an explanatory sequential mixed-methods methodology to examine youth empowerment efforts in Lagos and Osun States, which represent two divergent governance contexts within Nigeria's federal system. Quantitative survey data from youth beneficiaries are integrated with qualitative interviews of institutional actors to evaluate the impact of collaborative arrangements on empowerment outcomes and the sustainability of youth empowerment programmes over time.

The results reveal that formal stakeholder engagement substantially predicts enhancements in economic, educational, and civic empowerment outcomes. Nonetheless, inadequate coordination structures, insufficient youth representation in decision-making processes, and financial limitations hinder sustainability. The research contends that sustained youth empowerment is optimally perceived as a governance result influenced by the quality of collaboration infrastructure, rather than only by the extent of programme scope or the magnitude of finance.

This paper situates youth empowerment within the framework of collaborative governance studies, extending theoretical insights to subnational contexts in the Global South and emphasising the institutional requirements that enable multi-actor arrangements to provide sustainable developmental outcomes.

**Keywords:** Collaborative governance, Stakeholder collaboration, Subnational governance, Sustainable development, Youth empowerment

## INTRODUCTION

Youth empowerment has emerged as a central concern in contemporary governance scholarship, not merely as a developmental objective but as a test of institutional capacity and state legitimacy. While global policy frameworks consistently position young people as drivers of economic growth, democratic renewal, and innovation (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2017; United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2019), the translation of these commitments into durable socio-economic outcomes remains uneven. Persistent youth unemployment, labour market exclusion, and political marginalisation—particularly in developing contexts—suggest that empowerment deficits are less a function of policy absence than of governance arrangements (International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2023).

Existing research on youth empowerment has predominantly focused on programme outputs, skills acquisition, or employability indicators (Jennings et al., 2006; World Bank, 2006). While valuable, such approaches often under-theorise the institutional and relational mechanisms that shape implementation and sustainability. Youth empowerment is frequently treated as a technocratic intervention rather than as a governance outcome embedded within complex inter-organisational systems. Yet empowerment, as conceptualised within empowerment theory, extends beyond economic participation to encompass the expansion of agency, access to resources, and inclusion in decision-making structures. From a governance perspective, empowerment is therefore relational and structural: it depends on how state and non-state actors coordinate resources, negotiate authority, and institutionalise accountability over time.

Collaborative governance theory provides the primary analytical lens for addressing this gap. Defined broadly as structured processes of collective decision-making that engage public agencies and non-state stakeholders in consensus-oriented implementation (Ansell & Gash, 2008), collaborative governance has been associated with enhanced legitimacy, resource pooling, innovation, and adaptive capacity in addressing complex public problems. Contemporary governance challenges—characterised by interdependence, uncertainty, and resource constraints—often exceed the capabilities of hierarchical bureaucracies or market-based mechanisms operating in isolation (Trivedi & Patel, 2023). Youth empowerment, which intersects education, employment, social protection, civic participation, and economic policy, represents precisely such a cross-sectoral policy domain. In this study, collaborative governance explains the processes through which stakeholder coordination shapes empowerment outcomes.

The sustainability dimension further intensifies these governance demands. Sustainable youth empowerment extends beyond short-term employment placement or temporary training schemes. It implies durable improvements in economic inclusion, institutional participation, and socio-political integration that persist beyond electoral cycles or funding windows. Sustainability therefore hinges on institutionalisation—on the extent to which collaborative arrangements become routinised, accountable, and resilient to political turnover. This shifts analytical focus from programme design to governance architecture: How are responsibilities distributed? How are conflicts managed? How are monitoring and accountability mechanisms structured? And how do collaborative dynamics shape long-term empowerment trajectories? Viewed through a transformative governance lens, these questions concern not only coordination effectiveness but also whether collaborative arrangements embed youth inclusion within enduring institutional structures.

These issues are particularly salient in decentralised and federal systems, where authority and implementation responsibilities are dispersed across multiple levels of government. Nigeria offers a compelling case in this regard. As Africa's most populous country, with a predominantly youthful demographic profile (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2022), Nigeria has adopted numerous youth-oriented initiatives over the past three decades. However, repeated cycles of programme introduction and reform suggest challenges not only of economic structure but also of coordination, institutional coherence, and sustained stakeholder engagement (Nmadu, 2023). Multiple ministries, agencies, private actors, civil society organisations, and development partners operate within the youth policy space, often with overlapping mandates and limited integration. Such fragmentation reflects broader governance dynamics in hybrid and resource-constrained institutional environments.

Subnational governments occupy a pivotal position within this governance landscape. Nigeria's federal structure grants states considerable autonomy in policy adaptation and implementation, rendering them critical arenas for examining how collaborative governance operates in practice. Lagos and Osun States present analytically contrasting yet instructive cases. Lagos, Nigeria's principal commercial centre, is characterised by a diversified economy and a comparatively institutionalised ecosystem of public–private partnerships. Osun, by contrast, operates within a more state-centric and agrarian-oriented political economy. These differences create variation in stakeholder configurations, resource bases, and collaborative incentives, offering an opportunity to explore how governance context conditions empowerment sustainability.

Despite the proliferation of youth initiatives at federal and state levels, empirical scholarship has rarely examined the collaborative arrangements underpinning these interventions. Studies tend to evaluate employment numbers or beneficiary perceptions without interrogating how inter-organisational relationships

shape policy continuity, accountability, and adaptive learning. This omission limits understanding of why certain initiatives demonstrate greater durability or systemic impact than others. This study therefore conceptualises sustainable youth empowerment as a governance outcome mediated by collaborative capacity and interpreted through a transformative institutional lens. It examines how stakeholder interactions influence programme design, implementation processes, accountability structures, and long-term institutionalisation in Lagos and Osun States between 2015 and 2024. Rather than treating empowerment as a discrete intervention, the analysis situates it within an evolving multi-actor governance system shaped by negotiation, coordination, and adaptation.

This study is conceptually informed by collaborative governance theory and empowerment theory, which together provide a framework for examining how stakeholder coordination shapes youth empowerment outcomes in subnational governance contexts. The study investigates the influence of stakeholder collaboration on youth empowerment outcomes in subnational governance contexts in Nigeria. The paper examines how collaborative governance arrangements among government institutions, private sector actors, and civil society organisations affect multidimensional youth empowerment outcomes in Lagos and Osun States -- two states with differing institutional and governance dynamics to identify the interactions among collaborative processes, institutional coordination, and contextual factors that lead to sustainable empowerment outcomes.

### Theoretical Framework

This study utilises collaborative governance theory, empowerment theory, and transformative governance to establish a comprehensive analytical framework for analysing stakeholder collaboration and youth empowerment. In collaborative governance theory, enduring collaboration relies on established platforms for communication and collective decision-making that diminish transaction costs and alleviate power imbalances among involved parties (Ansell & Gash, 2008). These structures facilitate the coordination of resources and knowledge across governments, business sector entities, and civil society organisations to tackle intricate public policy issues.

In addition to this viewpoint, empowerment theory defines youth empowerment as the enhancement of economic, social, and political agency within supportive institutional frameworks that enable young individuals to access resources, cultivate skills, and engage substantively in governance activities. Empowerment beyond mere program participation, encompassing the cultivation of competencies and institutional frameworks that facilitate enduring youth involvement.

Moreover, transformative governance offers a normative framework for evaluating whether collaborative arrangements integrate empowerment into sustainable institutional systems rather than perceiving it as a transient result of policy cycles. In the Lagos–Osun context, these viewpoints indicate that sustainable youth empowerment relies not just on the magnitude of programme funding but also on the quality, longevity, and institutional integration of stakeholder relationships. This study emphasises collaborative governance and bases empowerment outcomes on empowerment theory, redirecting analytical focus to the relational and institutional frameworks that influence the execution and sustainability of young empowerment projects.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

### Stakeholder Collaboration and Governance Dynamics

Stakeholder collaboration has become a central concept in contemporary governance scholarship, particularly in policy domains characterised by complexity, interdependence, and cross-sectoral responsibility. Broadly defined, stakeholder collaboration refers to the structured and purposeful interaction among individuals, groups, and organisations working collectively toward shared objectives in addressing societal and developmental challenges (Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015; Fares et al., 2021; Schruijer, 2020). Rather than relying solely on hierarchical government authority, collaborative approaches integrate diverse knowledge, resources, and competencies across sectors. Such arrangements are typically guided by principles of trust, transparency, mutual benefit, and open communication, which together create the conditions for coordinated problem-solving and collective action.

The concept of stakeholders encompasses a wide spectrum of actors involved in or affected by governance processes. Stakeholders are commonly defined as "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation's objectives" (Fares et al., 2021, p. 3). In public policy contexts, these actors include government agencies, private sector organisations, civil society groups, community associations, and individual citizens. Their involvement in governance processes may occur directly or indirectly through representative structures, particularly during policy planning, programme implementation, and evaluation (Ali et al., 2023). This inclusive orientation aligns with broader notions of participatory governance and public engagement, which emphasise accountability, legitimacy, and responsiveness in public decision-making.

Collaborative processes typically involve dialogue among stakeholders with varying perspectives and interests. The World Wildlife Fund describes stakeholder collaboration as a process through which diverse actors—whose views may converge or diverge—engage in deliberative dialogue to develop solutions that transcend individual institutional positions. Such interaction facilitates shared understanding, reduces policy fragmentation, and strengthens relationships necessary for sustainable governance outcomes. In practice, these dynamics reflect an ongoing transition from hierarchical governance structures toward networked and participatory models of policy coordination.

Within governance scholarship, stakeholder collaboration is closely associated with the framework of collaborative governance. Foundational work by Chris Ansell and Alison Gash conceptualises collaborative governance as structured engagement between public agencies and non-state stakeholders in collective, consensus-oriented decision-making processes (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Subsequent scholarship has expanded this perspective by emphasising the operational mechanisms through which collaboration unfolds. These mechanisms include stakeholder engagement, stakeholder communication, and stakeholder initiatives, each representing a distinct but interrelated dimension of collaborative governance dynamics (Trivedi & Patel, 2023).

Stakeholder engagement refers to the depth and continuity of stakeholder participation across different stages of the policy cycle, including agenda-setting, programme design, implementation, and evaluation. Effective engagement ensures that stakeholders contribute knowledge, resources, and perspectives that enhance policy relevance and legitimacy. Stakeholder communication, in turn, emphasises transparent, reciprocal, and sustained information exchange among actors, enabling coordination and alignment of activities (Ganeshu, 2023). Meanwhile, stakeholder initiatives capture the practical actions and programmes jointly developed or implemented through collaborative arrangements. Together, these elements form the operational foundation through which collaborative governance translates into tangible policy outcomes.

Empirical scholarship increasingly highlights the importance of stakeholder collaboration for inclusive development and institutional effectiveness. Studies demonstrate that collaborative arrangements can improve policy coordination, optimise resource allocation, and strengthen accountability mechanisms, particularly in contexts where governance responsibilities are distributed across multiple actors (Shishima, 2018; Berñe et al., 2023). By fostering shared ownership and collective problem-solving, collaboration enhances the capacity of governance systems to address complex social issues that extend beyond the remit of individual organisations.

However, the effectiveness of stakeholder collaboration is contingent upon institutional and contextual conditions. In many developing contexts, including Nigeria, fragmented communication channels, weak inter-agency coordination, and irregular stakeholder engagement have limited the effectiveness and sustainability of development initiatives (Nmadu, 2023; Ndukwe et al., 2023). These challenges underscore the importance of institutionalising collaborative mechanisms that promote continuous dialogue, coordinated implementation, and shared accountability.

Within the context of youth empowerment policies, stakeholder collaboration therefore functions as a governance mechanism that shapes programme coordination, implementation capacity, and long-term sustainability. By synchronising resources, aligning institutional mandates, and fostering inclusive decision-making, collaborative arrangements create the conditions under which empowerment initiatives can evolve beyond short-term interventions into durable systems of socio-economic inclusion. As such, stakeholder

collaboration provides a critical analytical lens for understanding how governance dynamics influence the effectiveness and sustainability of youth empowerment initiatives at the subnational level.

## Youth Empowerment: Frameworks, Aspects, and Systemic Limitations

Youth empowerment is understood as a complex process that improves the ability of young individuals to obtain education, develop skills, secure employment, pursue entrepreneurial ventures, assume leadership positions, and engage in democratic activities (United Nations, 2023; Ogunyewo & Oluwasuji, 2023). Empowerment, as defined by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2012), refers to "increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes" (p. 6). Vorng (2025) defines youth empowerment as a strategy for civic engagement and social justice, emphasising the role of youth as agents of change who cultivate critical thinking, leadership, and problem-solving skills in supportive environments that acknowledge their perspectives. Perkins and Zimmerman's (1995) empowerment model—comprising psychological, organisational, and community dimensions—serves as a foundational framework, highlighting mastery, participation, and engagement in governance.

Empirical literature highlights various enablers, including skill acquisition, entrepreneurship programmes, and structured empowerment initiatives, alongside constraints such as high youth unemployment, poverty, and institutional fragmentation (ILO, 2023; Heath & Moreau, 2024; Ile & Boadu, 2018). The review emphasises the significance of youth demographics in influencing policy priorities. It notes that substantial youth populations, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, offer potential for demographic dividends while also posing risks of social exclusion (Urdal, 2006; African Union, 2015). Ofusori (2025) identifies youth empowerment as a transformative mechanism for marginalised youth through mentorship, leadership, and resource access while Heath and Moreau (2024) contend that youth empowerment should be both transformational and sustainable, focusing on overcoming structural barriers to inclusion and fostering rights-based development via education, equality, and political participation. Fostering these dimensions establishes empowerment as a fundamental pillar, enabling young people to serve as agents of change rather than passive recipients of development interventions.

## Collaborative Governance as a Structure for Sustainable Youth Empowerment

Collaborative governance has emerged as a significant framework in modern public administration, reflecting a transition from traditional hierarchical, state-centric governance to networked structures that engage public agencies, private entities, and civil society. This approach acknowledges that intricate policy challenges frequently surpass the capabilities of single institutions, necessitating collaborative decision-making, pooled resources, and synchronised implementation efforts. Collaborative governance focuses on the importance of inclusive participation, deliberation, and shared responsibility in achieving public value.

Chris Ansell and Alison Gash characterise collaborative governance as a governing framework where public agencies involve non-state stakeholders in structured, consensus-driven, and deliberative processes aimed at formulating or executing public policy (Ansell & Gash, 2007). This conceptualisation highlights two key aspects: the pivotal function of public institutions in facilitating collaboration and the organised methods by which various stakeholders engage in the design and execution of policies. Expanding upon this foundation, Agnes Batory and Sara Svensson pinpoint essential dimensions that influence collaborative governance. These include the characteristics of the public–private relationship, the level of agency among participants, organisational frameworks, the phase of the policy process during which collaboration takes place, and the normative beliefs that steer cooperative interactions (Batory & Svensson, 2019).

The success of collaborative governance is significantly influenced by various contextual and institutional factors. The feasibility and durability of collaboration are influenced by pre-existing levels of trust, political environments, and socioeconomic conditions (Milagres et al., 2019). Formal institutional arrangements, including coordination mechanisms, contractual frameworks, and clearly defined roles, establish the structural foundation necessary for ongoing stakeholder engagement. In these contexts, collaborative governance has demonstrated significant effectiveness in tackling complex issues, which are marked by interdependence,

uncertainty, and multifaceted policy requirements (Voets et al., 2021). Integrating diverse knowledge, resources, and perspectives significantly improves the capacity for problem-solving and enhances responsiveness to policy challenges.

The interplay between leadership and stakeholder dynamics significantly influences collaborative outcomes. Effective leadership plays a crucial role in fostering dialogue, mediating conflicts, and maintaining stakeholder commitment throughout the policy cycle (Ansell & Gash, 2007; Bianchi et al., 2021). Stakeholders can operate as facilitators, resource providers, or co-creators of policy initiatives, highlighting the interconnected dynamics of collaborative arrangements (Khasanah et al., 2020). Power asymmetries continue to be a fundamental aspect of collaboration. Hafer et al. (2022) highlight that power functions across various dimensions—functional, critical, and social—impacting participation and influence in collaborative environments.

While it emphasises inclusivity and shared responsibility, collaborative governance necessitates certain enabling conditions, including institutional readiness, stakeholder capacity, and trust-building, to operate effectively (Batory & Svensson, 2019). In policy domains such as youth empowerment, collaborative governance offers a framework for examining how coordinated stakeholder engagement and communication lead to sustainable empowerment outcomes (Emerson et al., 2012; Trivedi & Patel, 2023). In Nigeria, the Lagos State Employment Trust Fund [LSETF] and the Osun Youth Empowerment Scheme [OYES] serve as examples of how various collaborative arrangements impact programme effectiveness, youth participation, and long-term sustainability at the subnational level.

**Approaches and Methods in Youth Development**

Youth development is widely understood as a deliberate and multidimensional process aimed at fostering the intellectual, emotional, social, and economic growth of young people, preparing them for productive adulthood and enabling them to contribute meaningfully to society. It encompasses the acquisition of life competencies, access to opportunities, and the promotion of well-being necessary for individuals to achieve their potential and participate actively in social and economic life. As such, youth development represents both a societal and developmental imperative, closely linked to national advancement, democratic participation, and sustainable development outcomes.

Contemporary scholarship increasingly situates youth development within broader rights-based and participatory frameworks. Sanyang (2021), drawing on the African Youth Charter, argues that youth empowerment must be understood within the context of the right to development, emphasising that young people should be actively involved in all phases of development—from policy formulation to implementation. Such participation strengthens agency, ownership, and accountability in governance processes. Similarly, Enaifoghe et al. (2024) emphasise that meaningful youth engagement in governance and social initiatives enhances both sustainability and democratic consolidation. Within this perspective, youth are not merely beneficiaries of development programmes but active partners—serving as collaborators, advisors, and innovators whose contributions shape socio-economic transformation.

Despite this normative shift toward participation, dominant paradigms of youth development have historically prioritised economic productivity and labour market integration. Miyano (2021) critiques these approaches for commodifying youth primarily as human capital, often neglecting broader dimensions of identity, social inclusion, and civic engagement. Such models, particularly when rooted in Eurocentric development frameworks, risk overlooking the cultural, political, and structural realities shaping youth experiences in post-colonial contexts. Consequently, scholars increasingly advocate more holistic approaches that recognise youth development as encompassing economic empowerment, social inclusion, political participation, and identity formation.

Within practical policy frameworks, skill acquisition and entrepreneurship have emerged as central pathways for advancing youth development. Skill acquisition refers to structured processes through which young people acquire vocational, technical, or digital competencies necessary for employment or entrepreneurial activity. These competencies help bridge the persistent gap between formal education systems and labour market demands. According to the ILO (2020), skills development is a crucial instrument for reducing inequality in

access to economic opportunities and enabling young people—particularly those from marginalised backgrounds—to participate productively in economic life. Empirical studies similarly highlight the importance of vocational and technical training in fields such as agriculture, information and communication technology, and artisanal trades, which equip youth with practical capabilities for self-reliance and income generation (Eze, 2023).

The accelerating transformation of global economies under the Fourth Industrial Revolution has further increased demand for digital competencies and adaptive skills. Osuagwu et al. (2015) emphasise the transformative role of information and communication technology (ICT) skills in enabling youth to access global markets, create digital enterprises, and participate in emerging knowledge economies. As a result, initiatives such as coding academies, digital innovation hubs, and entrepreneurship boot camps have become prominent mechanisms for equipping youth with future-oriented capabilities aligned with evolving labour market requirements.

Entrepreneurship represents a complementary pathway to youth development by enabling young people to apply acquired skills in innovative and income-generating ways. Rather than remaining solely job seekers, entrepreneurial youth can become job creators who contribute to local economic growth and community resilience. Rosado-Cubero et al. (2022) emphasise that entrepreneurship fosters creativity, resource mobilisation, and problem-solving capacity, while the UNDP (2021) highlights its role in strengthening economic independence and adaptive capacity among young populations. In contexts such as sub-Saharan Africa, where formal employment opportunities remain limited, youth entrepreneurship provides a viable pathway for economic participation through the establishment of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) that stimulate local economies (World Bank Group, 2023).

However, the success of youth entrepreneurship initiatives is often constrained by structural barriers, including limited access to finance, inconsistent policy frameworks, and weak mentorship systems (Ndukwe et al., 2023; Newo et al., 2023). Addressing these challenges requires coordinated support systems that integrate financial access, training, mentorship, and enabling regulatory environments. Bango (2023) emphasises the critical role of local governments in facilitating such support through targeted policies, infrastructure development, and partnership networks linking youth with financial institutions and private-sector actors.

Evidence from rapidly developing economies demonstrates the transformative potential of sustained investment in youth development ecosystems. Olonade et al. (2022) note that countries such as China, Japan, and several Southeast Asian economies have leveraged youth-driven innovation and entrepreneurship through coordinated policies, strategic investments in education and training, and supportive institutional environments. These experiences illustrate how integrated youth development strategies can catalyse long-term economic and technological advancement.

Overall, youth development is increasingly recognised as a multidimensional process requiring coordinated policy approaches that combine education, skills training, entrepreneurship promotion, and participatory governance mechanisms. Research consistently demonstrates that initiatives focused on entrepreneurship training, vocational development, and mentorship significantly enhance youth agency and socio-economic inclusion (OECD, 2017; Nmadu, 2023). However, structural challenges—including labour market constraints and limited access to resources—continue to limit the effectiveness of many youth programmes (Heath & Moreau, 2024; ILO, 2023). Consequently, effective youth empowerment depends not only on the availability of development pathways but also on the broader governance structures that coordinate stakeholders, mobilise resources, and sustain programme implementation. Integrating youth development initiatives within collaborative governance systems therefore becomes essential for ensuring that empowerment outcomes are durable, inclusive, and aligned with broader development objectives.

**The Relationship Between Youth Political Participation and Governance Outcomes**

Youth political participation has increasingly been recognised as a critical component of inclusive governance and democratic consolidation. Broadly defined, youth participation refers to the active engagement of young people in decision-making processes, initiatives, and civic activities that influence policies and societal

outcomes affecting their lives and communities. Within governance scholarship, such participation is viewed not merely as civic involvement but as a mechanism through which institutions enhance legitimacy, accountability, and responsiveness. By integrating youth perspectives into governance processes, political systems can better reflect societal diversity while strengthening democratic resilience.

Scholarly conceptualisations emphasise that youth participation extends beyond symbolic inclusion. Cahill and Dadvand (2018), drawing on Zeldin et al. (2014), describe youth participation as a multidimensional construct encompassing civic engagement, social justice, citizenship, and positive youth development. In this framework, participation operates across several interrelated domains—including purpose, positioning, process, protection, perspective, place, and power relations—which collectively shape the depth and effectiveness of youth engagement. Their application of the Typology of Youth Participation and Empowerment (TYPE) Pyramid further illustrates the progressive nature of participatory engagement, culminating in equitable youth–adult partnerships where decision-making authority is shared and institutional transformation becomes possible.

From a policy perspective, youth participation also carries normative and instrumental significance. Farthing (2015) argues that youth participation enables young people to express their views, influence policy decisions, and contribute to governance processes affecting their futures. He identifies four key justifications for youth engagement: the fulfilment of youth rights, the empowerment of young people, the improvement of policy efficiency, and the promotion of personal development. When youth voices are incorporated into governance systems, policies are more likely to reflect the lived experiences and priorities of younger populations, thereby improving institutional responsiveness and effectiveness.

Political participation itself encompasses a broad spectrum of activities through which citizens influence governance. Longley (2021) notes that such activities include voting, campaigning, public advocacy, petitioning, community mobilisation, and engagement with elected officials. These actions allow individuals to shape public discourse and policy outcomes through both formal and informal political channels. Similarly, Akinyetun (2021) defines political participation as the ability of citizens to influence governance through various civic actions that contribute to nation-building and democratic accountability.

The normative foundations of participation are closely linked to human rights principles. The United Nations emphasises that political participation encompasses the freedom to speak, organise, campaign, vote, and hold public office, recognising these activities as essential components of democratic governance. From this perspective, youth participation is not only a civic responsibility but also a protected right that enables young people to shape public institutions and societal development.

Participation also plays an important role in shaping governance outcomes through institutional interaction. Creighton (2022) conceptualises public participation as a two-way communication process between governments and citizens that incorporates public concerns, needs, and values into policy decisions. His participation continuum—from information dissemination to collaborative problem-solving—illustrates the multiple levels at which citizens can influence governance processes. Earlier contributions by Connor (1988) similarly frame citizen participation as a redistribution of power that enables historically marginalised groups to gain influence in decision-making processes. Within this framework, effective participation requires access to information, opportunities for consultation, and mechanisms that allow citizens to meaningfully shape policy outcomes.

For young people specifically, participation provides a pathway for exercising civic rights while contributing to institutional development. Activities such as voting, advocacy, community organising, public campaigning, and contesting elections enable youth to influence governance priorities and ensure that their interests are represented in policy processes. When such engagement is institutionalised, it can strengthen the inclusiveness and legitimacy of democratic institutions.

Empirical scholarship further highlights the relationship between youth participation and governance effectiveness. Studies suggest that collaborative governance arrangements and stakeholder engagement mechanisms can enhance youth representation, expand civic participation, and institutionalise youth

perspectives within policymaking processes (Planas-Lladó & Úcar, 2022; Shishima, 2018). In contrast, the marginalisation of youth voices may weaken programme effectiveness and reduce the legitimacy of governance institutions, particularly in societies with large youth populations.

Ultimately, youth political participation contributes to broader governance outcomes by strengthening democratic accountability, policy responsiveness, and institutional legitimacy. When young people are meaningfully engaged in governance processes, they contribute new perspectives, innovation, and energy to public problem-solving. In this sense, youth participation functions not only as a mechanism of empowerment but also as a governance resource that enhances institutional adaptability and sustainability. Within the context of this study, understanding how collaborative governance structures influence youth participation provides an important analytical lens for examining the sustainability of empowerment initiatives and governance outcomes in subnational contexts such as Lagos and Osun States.



Figure 1: Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework delineates the structured relationship among collaborative governance, sustainable youth empowerment, and transformative governance. Collaborative governance serves as the essential framework, implemented through organised dialogue, collective decision-making, resource alignment, and systems of accountability. The processes involved create a framework for sustainable youth empowerment that spans economic, social, and political dimensions, encompassing aspects such as employment, skill development, agency, and civic participation. Transformative governance acts as a framework for evaluation, examining the sustainability, inclusivity, accountability, and systemic resilience of empowerment results. The model highlights that sustainable youth empowerment arises from formalised collaboration and is then assessed according to established governance criteria.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a pragmatic research philosophy, which emphasises the practical application of knowledge and the use of multiple methods to address complex social problems (Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020). Pragmatism supports methodological flexibility and the integration of quantitative and qualitative approaches to generate contextually relevant and policy-oriented knowledge (Elder-Vass, 2022; Elgeddawy & Abouraia, 2024). This orientation was suitable for examining how stakeholder collaboration influences the effectiveness, coordination, and sustainability of youth empowerment initiatives in Lagos and Osun States, Nigeria.

Guided by this philosophical orientation, the study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods research design. In this design, quantitative data were first collected and analysed, followed by qualitative data

to further explain and contextualise the quantitative results. This approach enabled the study to capture both measurable outcomes of youth empowerment initiatives and the institutional dynamics shaping collaborative governance.

In the quantitative phase, data were collected from 461 youth beneficiaries of empowerment programmes drawn from an estimated population of 886,975 youths across Lagos and Osun States. The sample size was determined using Cochran's formula for large populations. A multistage stratified sampling technique was used to ensure representation across geographical locations and socio-economic categories. A structured questionnaire served as the primary data collection instrument. The instrument was validated through expert review and pilot testing, and reliability was confirmed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficients ranging from 0.749 to 0.983, indicating strong internal consistency. The questionnaire measured key dimensions of youth empowerment, including access to training opportunities, skills acquisition, employment prospects, entrepreneurial support, leadership engagement, and democratic participation.

The qualitative phase involved semi-structured interviews with 37 purposively selected institutional stakeholders, including government officials, private sector actors, and civil society representatives involved in youth empowerment programmes. Purposive sampling was used to select participants with direct experience in programme design, implementation, and coordination, enabling deeper insights into governance processes, inter-organisational collaboration, and institutional constraints affecting programme effectiveness.

Quantitative data were collected through face-to-face administration of a structured questionnaire, yielding a response rate of 89.4%, with 94.9% of responses considered valid for analysis. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistical techniques to examine relationships between stakeholder collaboration and youth empowerment outcomes. Specifically, ordinal logistic regression analysis was employed to assess the influence of stakeholder collaboration variables on ordinal measures of youth empowerment outcomes. The qualitative interviews were conducted either in person or virtually, recorded with participants' consent, and transcribed for analysis. The transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis, which enabled the identification of key patterns relating to governance structures, coordination mechanisms, and challenges affecting collaborative implementation.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings occurred during the interpretation stage, where qualitative insights were used to clarify and expand the statistical results. Ethical standards were strictly maintained throughout the study, including informed consent, voluntary participation, and confidentiality of respondents. Through this mixed-methods approach, the study provides a comprehensive analysis of how stakeholder collaboration shapes the implementation and sustainability of youth empowerment initiatives within subnational governance contexts in Nigeria.

**Data Analysis**

The analysis combined quantitative and qualitative methods, aligned with the explanatory sequential mixed-methods design and the study's pragmatic philosophical orientation. Quantitative data collected from 424 youth beneficiaries provided initial measurable insights into the impact of stakeholder collaboration on youth empowerment outcomes. Descriptive statistics were first used to profile respondents and illustrate the distribution of key empowerment indicators across Lagos and Osun States. The sample was predominantly male (54.48%) with a mean age of 25.96 years (SD = 4.83). Education levels ranged from primary school completion (5.42%) to tertiary education (44.10%), while 6.61% had vocational or technical training (see Table 1).

Table 1. Demographic profile of respondents

| Category | Variable | Frequency | % | Mean | Std. Dev. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Age (years)* | 18 - 24 | 185 | 43.63 | 25.96/26 years | 4.83/5 years |
| | 25 - 29 | 117 | 27.59 | | |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 30 - 35 | 122 | 28.78 | | | |
| | Total | 424 | 100 | | | |
| *Gender* | Male | 231 | 54.48 | | | |
| | Female | 193 | 45.52 | | | |
| | Total | 424 | 100 | | | |
| *Educational Qualification* | No Formal | 3 | 0.71 | | | |
| | Primary | 23 | 5.42 | | | |
| | Secondary | 186 | 43.87 | | | |
| | Tertiary | 187 | 44.10 | | | |
| | Technical | 25 | 5.90 | | | |
| | Total | 424 | 100 | | | |
| *State of Residence* | Lagos State | 331 | 78.07 | | | |
| | Osun State | 93 | 21.93 | | | |
| | Total | 424 | 100 | | | |
| *Formal Employment?* | Yes | 204 | 48.11 | | | |
| | No | 220 | 51.89 | | | |
| | Total | 424 | 100 | | | |
| *Running a Business or Startup?* | Yes | 118 | 27.83 | | | |
| | No | 306 | 72.17 | | | |
| | Total | 424 | 100 | | | |
| *Leadership Position?* | Yes | 135 | 31.84 | | | |
| | No | 289 | 68.16 | | | |
| | Total | 424 | 100 | | | |
| *Participation in Political or Civic Activities?* | Yes | 145 | 34.20 | | | |
| | No | 279 | 65.80 | | | |
| | Total | 424 | 100 | | | |

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Empowerment indicators reflected considerable variation as shown in Table 2 while the correlation evident in Figure 2 aligns with the statistical findings presented in Table 2. The dimensions of youth empowerment that stand out most significantly are learning opportunities and employment level, as indicated by their comparatively higher mean scores. In contrast, the metrics for skills acquisition and leadership positions exhibit significantly lower values, clearly highlighting the gap between outcomes derived from opportunity-

based empowerment and those stemming from more profound structural empowerment aspects, including leadership inclusion and skill development.

Entrepreneurship engagement and democratic participation hold significant roles within the overall distribution. The graphical representation underscores the disparities in empowerment outcomes, indicating that although empowerment initiatives may create avenues for youth engagement, the conversion of these opportunities into consistent economic and leadership results is inconsistent.

The findings illustrated in Table 2 and Figure 2 reveal that youth empowerment outcomes in the study context show moderate access to opportunities, while outcomes related to skill development and leadership inclusion are notably less robust. The findings establish a solid empirical foundation for the following inferential analysis that investigates the impact of stakeholder collaboration on the differences observed in youth empowerment outcomes.

Table 2. Mean distribution of youth empowerment indicators in Lagos and Osun States

| Indicator | Mean | Standard Deviation (SD) |
|---|---|---|
| **Learning Opportunities** | 3.28 | 1.12 |
| **Skills Acquisition Index** | 2.28 | 1.29 |
| **Employment Level** | 3.26 | 1.32 |
| **Entrepreneurship Engagement** | 2.86 | 1.49 |
| **Leadership Position** | 2.60 | 1.24 |
| **Democratic Participation** | 2.97 | 1.10 |

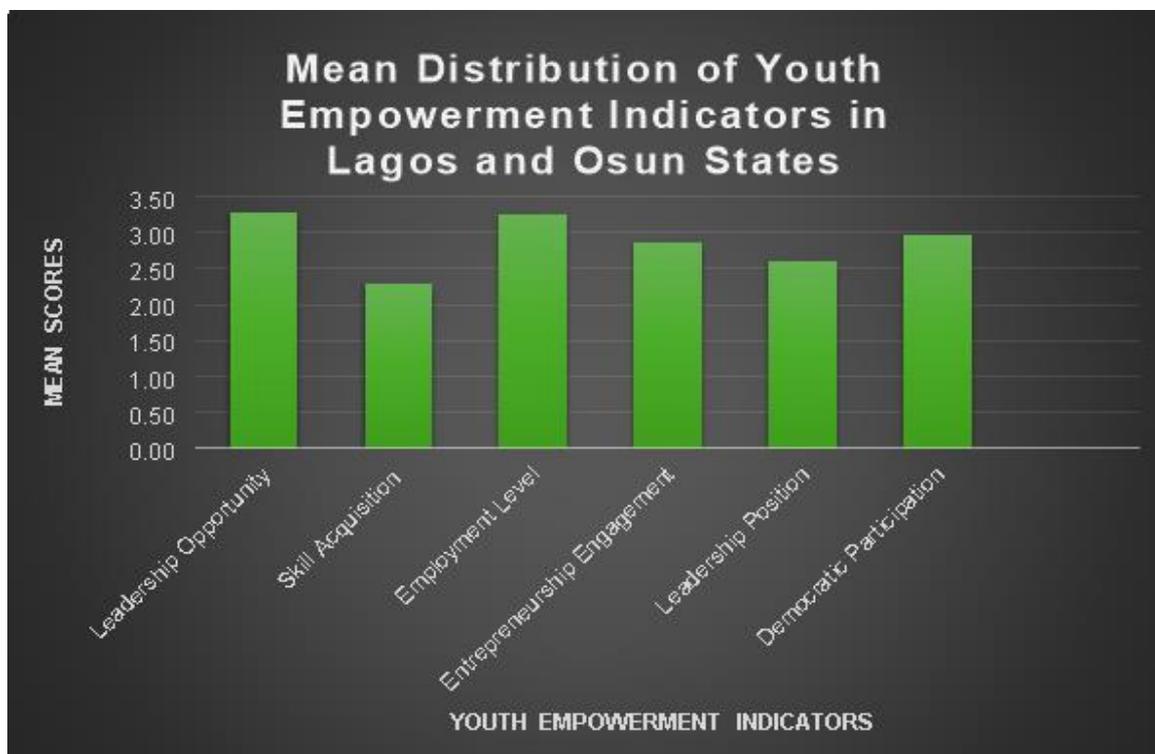Source: Field Survey (2025)



Figure 2: Mean Distribution of Youth Empowerment Indicators in Lagos and Osun States

Ordinal logistic regression analysis was performed to examine the relationships between stakeholder collaboration variables and youth empowerment outcomes. The findings, illustrated in Table 3, reveal that all correlations were statistically significant (p < .001), indicating robust associations between stakeholder-driven interventions and several aspects of youth empowerment.

Stakeholder initiatives were strong predictors of opportunity-based outcomes, such as learning opportunities (Wald $\chi^2$ = 1874.48, Nagelkerke $R^2$ = .993) and employment levels (Wald $\chi^2$ = 1742.08, Nagelkerke $R^2$ = .989). The extent of stakeholders' programmes proved to be a crucial predictor of capability and resource results, encompassing skills development (Wald $\chi^2$ = 1873.23, Nagelkerke $R^2$ = .992) and entrepreneurial funding (Wald $\chi^2$ = 1860.93, Nagelkerke $R^2$ = .992). The programme reach considerably predicted leadership participation (Wald $\chi^2$ = 1670.00, Nagelkerke $R^2$ = .988), whereas stakeholder initiatives strongly predicted democratic participation (Wald $\chi^2$ = 1573.71, Nagelkerke $R^2$ = .984).

Collectively, these findings offer substantial empirical validation for the study's hypotheses, demonstrating that both the intensity of stakeholder activities and the scope of programme reach greatly influence the educational, economic, leadership, and civic aspects of youth empowerment.

Table 3. Hypothesised relationships among variables

| Predictor | Outcome | Wald $\chi^2$ | PseudoR² (Nagelkerke) | p-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Stakeholder Initiatives** | Learning Opportunities | 1874.484 | .993 | <.001 |
| **Reach of Stakeholders' Programmes** | Skill Acquisition | 1873.225 | .992 | <.001 |
| **Stakeholder Initiatives** | Employment Levels | 1742.076 | .989 | <.001 |
| **Reach of Stakeholders' Programmes** | Entrepreneurial Funding | 1860.925 | .992 | <.001 |
| **Reach of Stakeholders' Programmes** | Leadership Position | 1670.000 | .988 | <.001 |
| **Stakeholder Initiatives** | Democratic Participation | 1573.709 | .984 | <.001 |

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Subnational comparisons revealed that Lagos' innovation-driven governance yielded higher predictive values for skills acquisition and entrepreneurship outcomes, whereas Osun's state-led approach showed stronger associations with civic and leadership participation. These findings underscore the role of structural and institutional contexts in shaping the effectiveness of collaborative governance mechanisms.

Qualitative analysis of 37 purposively selected institutional actors provided contextual depth, thematic triangulation, and explanatory nuance. Key emergent themes included coordination gaps, funding limitations, policy integration, and youth representation (Table 4). Representative quotes illustrated how governance practices, trust, and accountability mechanisms affected the sustainability of empowerment initiatives.

Table 4. Summary of qualitative themes

| Theme | Description | Representative Insights |
|---|---|---|
| Coordination Gaps | Overlapping mandates and fragmented communication among actors | Efforts are often duplicated due largely to ill-defined goals. |
| Funding Constraints | Limited and inconsistent financial support for youth programmes | Budgets are insufficient and unpredictable. |

| Policy Integration | Discrepancies between federal and state youth policies | Policies are not well aligned across levels. |
|---|---|---|
| Youth Representation | Insufficient inclusion of youth in planning and decision-making | Youth are often seen as beneficiaries, rather than co-creators whose opinion matter at all phases. |

Source: Field Survey (2025)

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings yielded an in-depth understanding of how collaborative governance processes—via structured engagement, trust-building, and accountability mechanisms—generate sustainable youth empowerment outcomes. This methodology aligns with transformational governance and empowerment theories, linking statistical strength with practical and institutional value. The analysis reveals that youth empowerment depends on both the availability of programmes and the presence of strong, context-sensitive governance mechanisms that ensure long-term sustainability in Lagos and Osun States.

# DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study investigated the influence of stakeholder collaboration on multidimensional youth empowerment outcomes in Lagos and Osun States, Nigeria. By integrating quantitative and qualitative evidence, the findings demonstrate that youth empowerment outcomes are not solely the result of individual programmes but emerge from coordinated institutional interactions among governmental agencies, private sector actors, and civil society organisations. The results therefore reinforce the argument that empowerment outcomes are shaped by governance processes that structure how actors collaborate, allocate resources, and implement development initiatives.

## Governance Dynamics and Collaborative Effectiveness

The quantitative results reveal that stakeholder collaboration significantly predicts multiple dimensions of youth empowerment. Stakeholder initiatives and the reach of stakeholder programmes exhibited strong and statistically significant relationships with learning opportunities, skills acquisition, employment levels, entrepreneurial funding, leadership participation, and democratic engagement. The ordinal logistic regression models demonstrated substantial explanatory power, with Nagelkerke pseudo $R^2$ values ranging from .984 to .993, suggesting that collaborative governance variables account for a considerable proportion of the variation observed across empowerment outcomes.

These findings align with collaborative governance theory, which emphasises that complex policy challenges require coordinated action among multiple actors operating within shared institutional arrangements. According to Emerson et al. (2012), collaborative governance regimes enable public institutions, private organisations, and civil society groups to combine their resources, knowledge, and decision-making authority to achieve policy outcomes that would be difficult to accomplish independently. Similarly, Trivedi and Patel (2023) argue that collaborative governance enhances policy effectiveness by strengthening communication, coordination, and shared accountability among stakeholders. The empirical evidence from this study supports these arguments by demonstrating that coordinated stakeholder initiatives significantly influence youth empowerment outcomes across educational, economic, and political domains.

However, the findings also indicate that the presence of multiple stakeholders alone does not guarantee effective collaboration. The qualitative evidence suggests that governance structures play a critical role in shaping how collaboration translates into tangible empowerment outcomes. Participants highlighted challenges such as fragmented communication among implementing agencies, inconsistent monitoring and evaluation practices, funding constraints, and limited youth participation in programme governance. These governance gaps often weaken the effectiveness of otherwise well-designed empowerment initiatives. The findings therefore suggest that collaborative governance must be supported by institutional mechanisms that facilitate coordination, accountability, and inclusive decision-making.

## Empowerment Pathways and Multidimensional Outcomes

The findings also highlight the interconnected nature of youth empowerment processes. Descriptive statistics revealed that learning opportunities and employment outcomes recorded relatively higher mean values compared with other empowerment dimensions. This suggests that empowerment initiatives have been comparatively successful in expanding access to educational and employment opportunities. In contrast, lower scores for skills acquisition and leadership participation show that deeper forms of structural empowerment remain less developed.

This pattern suggests that empowerment initiatives often succeed in expanding opportunities but may face challenges in translating these opportunities into sustained capabilities and institutional inclusion. Youth development literature frequently identifies this gap between opportunity provision and long-term capability development. While training programmes and employment schemes can increase access to resources, durable empowerment requires sustained investments in skills development, institutional representation, and participation in governance processes.

The qualitative findings reinforce this interpretation by illustrating how empowerment outcomes evolve through interconnected pathways. Participants noted that skills acquisition and entrepreneurial support often function as intermediate mechanisms linking education and training opportunities to broader outcomes such as employment, leadership participation, and democratic engagement. In this sense, empowerment is best understood as a cumulative process in which progress in one domain generates enabling conditions for advancement in others.

These dynamics reflect broader theoretical perspectives within empowerment theory, which conceptualises empowerment as a multidimensional process involving economic capability, social inclusion, and political participation. The results of this study support this conceptualisation by demonstrating that youth empowerment outcomes are interconnected rather than independent. Programmes that simultaneously address skills development, entrepreneurship, and civic participation therefore appear more likely to generate sustainable empowerment outcomes than fragmented interventions focused on isolated dimensions.

## Institutional Context and Subnational Variation

The qualitative findings also reveal important contextual differences between Lagos and Osun States that shape how collaborative governance arrangements operate in practice. In Lagos State, stakeholders described a dynamic public–private partnership ecosystem that facilitates entrepreneurial innovation and employment creation. Government agencies collaborate actively with private firms, financial institutions, and development organisations to implement youth empowerment programmes. This collaborative ecosystem enables youth participants to access broader economic networks, thereby strengthening the sustainability of empowerment outcomes.

In contrast, empowerment initiatives in Osun State were characterised by a more centralised governance model in which the state government plays a dominant role in programme implementation. While this structure provides administrative coordination, participants reported challenges related to limited resource mobilisation and weaker integration with private sector and development partners. As a result, empowerment programmes sometimes struggled to connect youth beneficiaries with broader economic opportunities. These findings highlight the importance of adaptive governance arrangements capable of aligning empowerment initiatives with local institutional capacities and economic contexts.

The contrast between the two states illustrates how contextual conditions influence the effectiveness of collaborative governance processes. Transformative governance theory emphasises the importance of adaptive institutional arrangements that respond to local socio-economic realities and stakeholder dynamics (Emerson et al., 2012). The findings of this study support this perspective by demonstrating that empowerment initiatives are more effective when governance structures facilitate cross-sectoral collaboration and integration with wider economic systems.

**Implications for Policy and Theory**

The findings reveal that sustainable youth empowerment depends on three interrelated factors: effective stakeholder collaboration, supportive governance mechanisms, and sensitivity to contextual conditions. Collaborative initiatives appear most effective when institutional arrangements enable coordination among stakeholders, ensure accountability in programme implementation, and incorporate youth perspectives into decision-making processes.

From a policy perspective, these findings suggest the need for structured coordination platforms that facilitate regular interaction among government agencies, private sector actors, and civil society organisations involved in youth empowerment initiatives. Strengthening monitoring and evaluation frameworks could also improve accountability and programme learning. Furthermore, expanding youth representation in programme governance may enhance the responsiveness and legitimacy of empowerment initiatives.

The study also contributes to theoretical debates on collaborative governance and youth empowerment by demonstrating empirically how coordinated institutional action can generate multidimensional empowerment outcomes. By linking collaborative governance processes to educational, economic, and civic empowerment dimensions, the findings extend existing scholarship on the institutional determinants of youth development and provide evidence of how collaborative governance structures can promote inclusive socio-economic transformation at the subnational level.

# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study investigated the impact of stakeholder collaboration on youth empowerment outcomes in Lagos and Osun States, Nigeria. The findings indicate that sustainable youth empowerment is significantly shaped by collaborative governance frameworks that enable coordinated engagement among government agencies, private sector actors, and civil society organisations. The analysis demonstrates that stakeholder participation, effective communication, and coordinated programme implementation play a critical role in achieving empowerment outcomes such as access to learning opportunities, skills acquisition, entrepreneurial development, employment generation, leadership participation, and civic engagement.

The findings further suggest that the institutionalisation of collaborative governance mechanisms, adapted to local socio-economic contexts, improves both the short-term effectiveness and long-term sustainability of youth empowerment initiatives. Rather than emerging from isolated programme interventions, empowerment outcomes appear to develop through institutional processes that promote cooperation, resource sharing, and collective decision-making among stakeholders. This reinforces the view that youth empowerment should be understood as a systemic governance outcome shaped by institutional coordination and participatory policy processes.

However, the study also identifies structural challenges that limit the full realisation of empowerment objectives. Persistent coordination gaps among implementing agencies, limited youth representation in governance processes, and constraints in financial and institutional resources continue to affect programme effectiveness. The comparative evidence from Lagos and Osun States highlights the importance of institutional context in shaping empowerment outcomes. Lagos' innovation-oriented ecosystem, characterised by dynamic public–private partnerships, appears to offer stronger opportunities for youth entrepreneurship and employment creation. In contrast, Osun's predominantly state-driven model, while administratively structured, faces greater challenges in resource mobilisation and in linking empowerment programmes to broader economic opportunities.

These findings underscore the importance of aligning collaborative governance arrangements with local institutional capacities and socio-economic conditions. The results support the theoretical propositions of collaborative governance and empowerment theory, suggesting that empowerment outcomes depend not only on the availability of programmes but also on the relational and institutional dynamics shaping stakeholder interactions. Effective youth empowerment therefore requires governance systems that facilitate coordination, encourage inclusive participation, and support adaptive policy implementation.

Based on these findings, several practical policy measures can strengthen youth participation and improve the sustainability of empowerment initiatives in Nigeria. A key policy priority is the institutionalisation of formal coordination mechanisms within state governance structures. Establishing inter-agency coordination platforms within state ministries responsible for youth development can enhance collaboration among government departments, private sector partners, and civil society organisations. Such platforms—supported by executive directives or legislative instruments—can reduce programme duplication, improve information sharing, and facilitate joint resource mobilisation.

Strengthening youth participation in governance processes is equally important. Institutional mechanisms that enable young people to contribute to policy formulation and programme oversight can enhance both the legitimacy and effectiveness of empowerment initiatives. The establishment of youth advisory councils, participatory policy forums, and consultative platforms at the state level would provide structured opportunities for young people to participate in programme design, implementation, and evaluation.These mechanisms would enhance the responsiveness and legitimacy of youth development policies while fostering civic engagement among young citizens.

Another critical policy direction involves integrating empowerment initiatives with broader economic development strategies. Linking skills development programmes with mentorship networks, internships, business incubation platforms, and accessible financing mechanisms would create more sustainable pathways from training to employment and entrepreneurship. Partnerships between government institutions, private sector organisations, and innovation hubs could further strengthen youth enterprise development and labour market integration.

Improved monitoring and evaluation systems are also necessary to sustain programme effectiveness. Developing evaluation frameworks that combine quantitative indicators—such as employment outcomes and enterprise formation—with qualitative indicators of leadership participation and civic engagement would provide a more comprehensive assessment of youth empowerment outcomes. Strengthened monitoring systems would enhance programme accountability while enabling policymakers to refine strategies based on empirical evidence.

Overall, the findings indicate that sustainable youth empowerment does not arise merely from the existence of empowerment programmes but from the governance environments within which these programmes operate. Embedding stakeholder collaboration within well-coordinated, participatory, and context-sensitive governance structures increases the likelihood that youth empowerment initiatives will generate transformative and long-term socio-economic outcomes. By establishing an empirical link between collaborative governance processes and youth empowerment outcomes, this study contributes to ongoing scholarly debates on governance and youth development while offering policy-relevant insights for strengthening youth empowerment initiatives at the subnational level in Nigeria.

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