



**YOUTHS ENGAGEMENT IN AGRICULTURAL CO-OPERATIVES: A STRATEGY TO REDUCE UNEMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL VICES IN ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA**

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**Abstract**

Agricultural co-operatives have traditionally been seen as a means of enhancing productivity, rural development and providing youths opportunities for skill-building, teamwork and community engagement among others. While previous researches had noted co-operatives' role in socio-economic development, gaps exist in their effectiveness for engaging youths. This study therefore centred on youths engagement in agricultural co-operatives as a strategy to reduce unemployment and social vices in Enugu State, Nigeria. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study and carried out in Enugu East and Nkanu East Local Government Areas of Enugu State respectively, with 271 members from 13 selected registered primary co-operative societies, who are predominantly farmers and youth based, sampled. Data were analyzed in frequency tables, simple percentages and mean with the aid of a 5-point likert scale, while hypotheses were tested using Pearson Correlation Co-efficient. Results showed that youth engagement in agricultural co-operatives had a significant positive relationship with reduction in unemployment ( $r = 0.423 < 0.983$   $p < 0.05$ ) and social vices ( $r = 0.462 < 0.966$ ,  $p < 0.05$  in Enugu State). The study concluded that youths engagement in agricultural co-operatives significantly reduces unemployment and social vices in Enugu State, fostering socioeconomic development. State government should invest in agricultural co-operatives for youth employment to reduce unemployment rates in Enugu State; State government should support youth-focused co-operative programs to mitigate social vices through increased productive engagement. This study enhances understanding of how agricultural co-operatives empower youth, reduce unemployment, and link participation to improved social behavior and decreased social vices.

**Keywords:** Agricultural Co-operatives, Unemployment, Social Vices, Enugu State.

**Introduction**

Agricultural co-operatives have traditionally been seen as a means of boosting agricultural productivity and supporting rural development. They offer several advantages for young people, such as a structured environment for skill development, teamwork, and a sense of purpose and community. These factors are essential in combating unemployment and its associated social issues (Adebayo *et al.*, 2024). However, their potential to tackle broader socio-economic issues like unemployment and social vices remains underutilized. In developing countries like Nigeria, high youth unemployment and widespread social problems, including drug abuse and crime, pose serious challenges. These problems are often worsened by idleness and the lack of productive engagement (Abayomi & Olamide, 2023). The co-operative model, which emphasizes collective effort and shared benefits, offers a promising approach to providing employment opportunities, engaging youth in productive activities, and countering the appeal of harmful behaviors (Okonkwo & Adewale, 2023).

Identifying theoretical problems is essential in research, as it reveals gaps within existing literature and establishes a foundation for resolving outstanding issues. Regarding youth participation in agricultural co-operatives, although numerous studies have examined their role in rural development and job creation (Adebayo et al., 2024), there is limited targeted research on how youth engagement in these co-operatives can effectively tackle unemployment and social issues in Nigeria. Most studies tend to focus on the overall benefits of co-operatives or youth employment individually, without adequately investigating how their combination could address social challenges such as substance abuse and crime (Ibrahim & Musa, 2022).

Research has largely concentrated on various geographical contexts, emphasizing rural development through agricultural co-operatives or youth employment in urban areas (Chukwu & Obioha, 2021). Moreover, (Eke & Nnamdi, 2022) noted that while some studies have highlighted the contributions of co-operatives to socio-economic development there remains a significant gap in understanding how these organizations can be tailored to better engage youths and offer meaningful employment opportunities that mitigate idleness and associated risks. This study aims to address these gaps by exploring how agricultural co-operatives can empower youth in Enugu State, promoting economic growth and social responsibility while contributing to academic and policy discussions on youth empowerment and social stability in Nigeria.

### Statement of Hypotheses

**H<sub>01</sub>:** Youths engagement in agricultural co-operatives has no significant relationship with reduction in unemployment in Enugu State

**H<sub>02</sub>:** Youths engagement in agricultural co-operatives has no significant relationship with reduction in social vices in Enugu State

### Review of Related Literature

#### *Conceptual Review*

##### *Agricultural Co-operatives*

Agricultural co-operatives are member-based organizations formed by farmers or agricultural stakeholders to collectively address common challenges, such as access to markets, resources, and technology. These co-operatives enable members to pool resources, share risks, and benefit from economies of scale, which can lead to increased productivity and profitability (Nwafor *et al.*, 2023). By working together, members of agricultural co-operatives can negotiate better prices for their products, reduce the costs of inputs like seeds and fertilizers, and access credit and financial services that might be unavailable to individual farmers (Akinwunmi & Bello, 2022). Ogbodo (2024) opines that agricultural co-operatives are also referred to as producers co-operative in which farmers pool their resources in certain areas of activity. Agricultural co-operatives unite single growers to boost their business productivity and increase yields.

The structure of agricultural co-operatives varies, but they typically operate under democratic principles, where each member has an equal vote in decision-making processes, regardless of the size of their contribution. This model fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility among members, promoting active participation and collaboration (Ifeanyi & Okechukwu, 2024). In addition to economic benefits, agricultural co-operatives can play a vital role in rural development by creating employment opportunities, improving access to education and training, and strengthening social networks within communities (Yakubu & Musa, 2022). They also encourage the adoption of sustainable farming practices by promoting collective action and knowledge sharing among members (Bassey & Emmanuel, 2023).

#### *Unemployment*

The term unemployment has been conceptualized by different scholars. For instance, Jato (2022) opines that unemployment is said to be a condition in which a person who is able to work (that is in the labor force) and is actively looking for a paid job, but cannot find one. That is someone is said to be unemployed when the person

does not have a job but is willing to, able to, and actively seeking work. Madan (2015) in Chukwudi and Nwachukwu (2022) define unemployment as the absence of opportunities of jobs for people willing to and actively looking for a job. The definition is based on the supply-demand phenomenon. He argues that this grossly ignores the aspect of value in employment. In as much as market equilibrium is emphasized, the labour value should be emphasized.

Ernest and Rani (2011) as cited in Nnachi and Ugochukwu (2023) observe unemployment as a state where people who are willing to work at the prevailing wage rate are unable to find jobs. Mostly; when the degree in which the people's gainful activities fail to make the maximum use of their productive capacity. It is a state of being without any job both for educated and uneducated persons; for earning one's living. Thus; the person is unable to get full employment even though he or she has reached the age prescribed by law to work. It can also be referred as a phenomenon that occurs when a person who is actively searching for employment and is unable to find work Nnachi and Ugochukwu (2023).

### ***Social Vices***

Social vices in Nigeria refer to behaviors and practices that deviate from societal norms, often leading to negative consequences for individuals and communities. These vices are widespread across different social strata and contribute to the erosion of moral values, the breakdown of social order, and the increase in crime rates. Common examples of social vices in Nigeria include drug abuse, cultism, internet fraud (popularly known as "Yahoo Yahoo"), armed robbery, and prostitution among others.

Drug abuse, particularly the misuse of substances like tramadol and codeine, has become prevalent among Nigerian youths. This often leads to addiction, mental health issues, and involvement in criminal activities (Nwosu & Chukwuma, 2023). Cultism, especially in educational institutions, involves secret cults engaging in violent activities, such as campus violence, kidnappings, and killings, creating a culture of fear and insecurity (Ajayi & Fagbemi, 2022).

Internet fraud, known locally as "Yahoo Yahoo" has gained notoriety among Nigerian youths, who engage in online scams to defraud unsuspecting victims globally. This has tarnished Nigeria's image internationally and led to various social and economic repercussions (Adeyemi & Olalekan, 2023). Armed robbery and kidnapping for ransom are other vices that continue to plague the nation, contributing to high levels of insecurity (Onyekachi & Ugochi, 2022).

These social vices are often fueled by high unemployment rates, poverty, lack of education, and inadequate social infrastructure. Addressing these underlying factors through education, employment opportunities, and community engagement is crucial for mitigating the spread of social vices and fostering a more secure and morally upright society in Nigeria (Obasi & Musa, 2024).

### **Theoretical Review**

The study was anchored on "Human Capital Theory", primarily developed by economists Gary Becker and Theodore Schultz in the early 1960s. Schultz introduced the idea in 1961, and Becker expanded on it in his book "Human Capital", published in 1964. The theory emphasizes the role of education, training, and experience in enhancing individuals' productivity, which can directly impact employment and reduce negative social behaviors. By investing in agricultural skills and co-operative activities in Enugu State, youths can acquire valuable competencies, increasing their employability and diverting them from social vices.

### **Empirical Review**

Nwosu *et al.* (2023) examined agricultural co-operatives as a catalyst for youth employment in Southeast Nigeria. Descriptive statistics and logistic regression were used, as the study found that youth involvement in agricultural

co-operatives significantly increased employment opportunities by 45%. It highlighted that co-operatives provided access to resources, markets, and training, which improved youths' ability to sustain agricultural ventures.

Adedayo and Ibrahim (2023) through descriptive statistics and regression analysis studied youth involvement in agricultural co-operatives as a strategy for reducing unemployment in rural Nigeria. They found that youth participation in agricultural co-operatives significantly increased employment opportunities and income levels, reducing the unemployment rate by 30% in the sampled areas.

Okafor *et al.* (2023) determined youth engagement in agricultural co-operatives: a strategy for combating youth idleness and unemployment. Chi-square tests and logistic regression were used. Findings showed that co-operative membership reduced youth idleness by 35% in urban areas and by 45% in rural areas, with a corresponding decrease in unemployment rates.

Abiola and Fatimah (2024) studied agricultural co-operatives and youth empowerment: a pathway to reducing social vices in Nigeria. The study through qualitative content analysis discovered that agricultural co-operatives provided not only employment but also mentorship, reducing social vices by 30% among participants.

Adebayo *et al.* (2024) evaluate the impact of agricultural co-operatives on youth employment in Southwest Nigeria. The analytical tools adopted were ANOVA and regression analysis. The authors discovered that agricultural co-operatives were found to increase youth employment by 50%, particularly in agribusiness and value-added services. The study emphasized that co-operative membership enhanced access to finance, which enabled youths to establish and sustain their agricultural enterprises.

Abubakar *et al.* (2024) through case study analysis and content analysis studied agricultural co-operatives and youth employment in Nigeria: a case study approach. They found that through the examination of three co-operatives, youth employment increased by 55% as a result of co-operative participation. The co-operatives facilitated access to credit and provided training that enabled youths to engage in profitable agricultural activities.

### Methodology

Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study and was carried out in Enugu State, Nigeria, precisely in Enugu East and Nkanu East Local Government Areas respectively. Majority of the inhabitants are farmers. The population of the study comprised 271 members from 13 selected registered primary co-operative societies, who are predominantly farmers and youth based as shown in the appendix, and was consequently adopted as the sample size owing to its manageable size. Instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire, with 10 items. Data were analyzed in frequency tables, simple percentages and mean through the aid of a 5-point likert scale, while the formulated hypotheses were tested using Pearson Correlation Co-efficient.

**Scale:** Strongly Agree (SA)-5, Agree (A)-4, Neutral (N)-3, Disagree (D)-2, Strongly Disagree (SD)-1

**Decision Rule:** If Mean  $\geq 3.0$ , the respondents agree and If mean  $< 3.0$ , the respondents disagree. Accept the null hypothesis if the computed  $r$  is less than the tabulated  $r$  otherwise rejects the null hypothesis.

### Analysis and Results

**Table 1: Responses on the relationship between youths engagement in agricultural co-operatives and reduction in unemployment in Enugu State**

Item	Opinion	5(SA)	4(A)	3(N)	2(D)	1(SD)	ΣFX	X	Decision
1	Agricultural co-operatives create job opportunities for youths	85	70	32	32	52	271	3.41	Agree
		31.4	25.8	11.8	11.8	19.3	100%		
2	Agricultural co-operatives offer income stability, lessening unemployment	61	70	40	32	68	271	3.10	Agree
		22.5	25.8	14.8	11.8	25.1	100%		
3	Youth involvement in agriculture increases employment chances	74	73	52	20	52	271	3.36	Agree
		27.3	26.9	19.2	7.4	19.2	100%		
4	Agricultural co-operatives foster entrepreneurship, curbing unemployment	86	73	28	60	24	271	3.51	Agree
		31.7	26.9	10.3	22.1	8.9	100%		
5	Skills acquired in agricultural co-operatives lower youth joblessness	74	73	52	44	28	271	3.45	Agree
		26.9	48.3	4.0	12.1	8.7	100%		
<b>Total</b>								<b>3.36</b>	

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Results indicate that the respondents were of the opinion that youth engagement in agricultural co-operatives help in reducing in unemployment among them in Enugu State. This is based on the aggregate mean score 3.36, which is above the minimum acceptance mean of 3.0.

**[Table 2 Responses on the relationship between youths engagement in agricultural co-operatives and reduction in social vices in Enugu State**

Item	Opinion	5(S A)	4(A)	3(N)	2(D)	1(S)	ΣFX	X	Decision
6	Agricultural co-operatives keep youths engaged, reducing social vices	65	122	28	44	12	271	3.68	Agree
		24.0	45.0	10.3	16.2	4.4	100%		
7	Agricultural co-operatives deter crime through productive youth activities	57	122	4	48	40	271	3.40	Agree
		45.0	54.0	1.5	17.7	14.8	100%		
8	Youth in agricultural co-operatives avoid negative influences, lowering vices	57	126	24	56	8	271	3.62	Agree
		21.0	46.5	8.9	20.7	3.0	100%		
8	Involvement in agriculture curbs youth participation in vices	49	102	60	35	25	271	3.42	Agree
		18.1	37.6	22.1	14.1	8.0	100%		
10	Youth centric agricultural co-operatives provide alternatives to crime and violence	87	68	56	52	8	271	3.64	Agree
		32.1	25.1	20.7	19.2	3.0	100%		
<b>Total</b>								<b>3.55</b>	

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Results show that the respondents were of the opinion that youth engagement in agricultural co-operatives help in reducing in youths' indulgence in social vices in Enugu State. This is based on the aggregate mean score 3.55, which is above the minimum acceptance mean of 3.0.

### Test of Hypotheses

H<sub>01</sub>: Youths engagement in agricultural co-operatives has no significant relationship with reduction in unemployment in Enugu State

**Table 3 Pearson Correlations on youths engagement in agricultural co-operatives and reduction in unemployment in Enugu State**

		Item 1	Item 2	Item 3	Item 4	Item 5
Item 1	Pearson Correlation	1	.654**	.647**	.699**	.615**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	271	271	271	271	271
Item 2	Pearson Correlation	.654**	1	.604**	.423**	.589**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	271	271	271	271	271
Item 3	Pearson Correlation	.647**	.604**	1	.789**	.983**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	271	271	271	271	271
Item 4	Pearson Correlation	.699**	.423**	.789**	1	.772**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	271	271	271	271	271
Item 5	Pearson Correlation	.615**	.589**	.983**	.772**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	271	271	271	271	271

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 shows the Pearson correlation matrix on youth engagement in agricultural co-operatives and reduction in unemployment, showing the correlation coefficients, significant values and the number of cases. The correlation coefficient shows  $0.423 < 0.983$ . This value indicates that correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2 tailed) and implies that youths engagement in agricultural co-operatives had a significant positive relationship with reduction in unemployment in Enugu State ( $r = 0.423 < 0.983$ ). The computed correlations coefficient is greater than the table value of  $r = 0.000$  with at alpha level for a two-tailed test ( $r = 0.423 < 0.983$   $p < 0.05$ ).

$H_{02}$ : Youths engagement in agricultural co-operatives has no significant relationship with reduction in social vices in Enugu State

**Table 4: Pearson Correlations on youths engagement in agricultural co-operatives and reduction in social vices in Enugu State**

		Item 6	Item 7	Item 8	Item 9	Item 10
Item 6	Pearson Correlation	1	.841**	.838**	.462**	.657**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	271	271	271	271	271
Item 7	Pearson Correlation	.841**	1	.966**	.626**	.570**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	271	271	271	271	271
Item 8	Pearson Correlation	.838**	.966**	1	.577**	.586**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	271	271	271	271	271
Item 9	Pearson Correlation	.462**	.626**	.577**	1	.377**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	271	271	271	271	271
Item 10	Pearson Correlation	.657**	.570**	.586**	.377**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	271	271	271	271	271

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4 shows the Pearson correlation matrix on youth engagement in agricultural co-operatives and reduction in social vices, showing the correlation coefficients, significant values and the number of cases. The correlation coefficient shows  $0.462 < 0.966$ . This value indicates that correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2 tailed) and implies that youths engagement in agricultural co-operatives had a significant positive relationship with reduction in social vices in Enugu State ( $r = 0.462 < 0.966$ ). The computed correlations coefficient is greater than the table value of  $r = .000$  with at alpha level for a two-tailed test ( $r = 0.462 < 0.966, p < 0.05$ ).

### **Discussion of Findings**

Result of hypothesis I showed that youths engagement in agricultural co-operatives had a significant positive relationship with reduction in social vices in Enugu State ( $r = 0.462 < 0.966, p < 0.05$ ). This study aligns with Adebayo *et al.* (2024), which noted a 50% rise in youth employment through agricultural co-operatives, particularly in agribusiness. Both studies underscore the importance of co-operatives in providing jobs, income stability, and fostering entrepreneurship, addressing unemployment and social issues. This research builds on existing knowledge by quantifying the link between co-operative participation and reduced social vices, demonstrating how such engagement promotes both economic growth and social responsibility. The structured support from co-operatives, including access to finance, empowers youths to establish sustainable enterprises, creating a sense of purpose and belonging that mitigates vulnerability to social vices.

It was further revealed in hypothesis II that youths engagement in agricultural co-operatives had a significant positive relationship with reduction in social vices in Enugu State ( $r = 0.423 < 0.983, p < 0.05$ ). This study's findings support those of Abiola and Fatimah (2024), which highlight agricultural co-operatives' role in reducing social vices among youths. Both studies indicate that participation in these co-operatives encourages involvement, mitigates negative influences, and offers alternatives to crime and violence. While Abiola and Fatimah reported a 30% decrease in social vices, this research advances the field by quantifying the significant correlation between youth engagement in agricultural co-operatives and reduced social vices in Enugu State. The supportive environment of co-operatives fosters personal growth through mentorship and community engagement, enhancing skill development and a sense of belonging, which ultimately lowers the risk of youth engaging in criminal activities and promotes community well-being.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The study concludes that youths engagement in agricultural co-operatives significantly reduces unemployment and social vices in Enugu State, fostering socioeconomic development. Owing to the findings, the following recommendations are made: The state government should invest in agricultural co-operatives for youth employment to reduce unemployment rates in Enugu State; the state government should support youth-focused co-operative programs to mitigate social vices through increased productive engagement.

### **Ethical clearance**

Ethical consent was sought and obtained from the participants used in this study. They were made to understand that the exercise was purely for academic purposes, and their participation was voluntary.

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The study was not funded.

### **Conflict of interest**

There is no conflict of interest

### **Authors' Contributions**

Prof. Clementina Ngozi Onyeze conceived the study, Itodo Emeka Paul, analyzed and interpreted the data while Bashir Mamman conceived the design. All the authors wrote, read and approved the final manuscript for publication in its current form.

### **Availability of data and materials.**

The datasets on which conclusions were made for this study are available on reasonable request

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## Appendix

### Population Distribution of Selected Primary Co-operative Societies

S/N	CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETY	LGA	REG.NO.	MEMBERS
1	Idinaotuamaka (Ugwuogo-Nike) Farmers MPCS Ltd.	Enugu East	EN14854	35
2	Mutual Benefit Farmers MPCS Ltd.	Enugu East	EN20351	20
3	Ofu-obi (Enugu East) Farmers MPCS Ltd.	Enugu East	EN5741	25
4	Ike-Oha MPCS Ltd.	Enugu East	EN20663	80
5	Amuzam Ugbawka Rice Production MPCS Ltd.	Nkanu East	EN19231	10
6	Ezinwanne (IsigweUgbawka) Rice Prod. MPCS Ltd.	Nkanu East	EN17707	15
7	Ifedioramma (Amechi-Idodo) Farmers MPCS Ltd.	Nkanu East	EN20339	20
8	Okpan-Uba (IsigweUgbawka) Rice Prod. MPCS Ltd.	Nkanu East	EN17716	10
9	Dynamic Farmers MPCS Ltd.	Nkanu East	EN20492	14
10	God's Grace Farmers MPCS Ltd.	Nkanu East	EN20336	12
11	Chimamanda MPCS Ltd.	Nkanu East	EN20939	10
12	Chidiuto MPCS Ltd.	Nkanu East	EN20943	10
13	Divine Help MPCS Ltd.	Nkanu East	EN20916	10
<b>Total</b>				<b>271</b>

Source: Field Survey, 2024.