

**THE ROLES OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT CHAIRMEN IN CREATING
EMPLOYMENT FOR THE RURAL YOUTHS IN AKWA IBOM STATE**

BY

Patrick Patrick Ekanem
Department of Political Science
College of Education, Afaha Nsit. AKS

Abstract

This study examined the roles of local government chairmen in creating employment for the rural youths in Akwa Ibom State. Descriptive design was adopted to carry out this research. The targeted population comprised all unemployed and employed youths in Akwa Ibom State. Stratified Sample technique was used to 15 unemployed youths from Eket, Uyo, and Ikot Ekpene senatorial district, and 25 employed youths were also selected from the same senatorial districts, in Akwa Ibom State. This gave a total of 120 respondents which formed the sample size used in carrying out this research. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled “Local Government Chairmen and Employment Creation Questionnaire (LGCECQ)”. Face and content validation of the instrument was carried out by an expert in test, measurement, and evaluation in order to ensure that the instrument has the accuracy, appropriateness, and completeness for the study under consideration. The reliability coefficient obtained was 0.91, and this was high enough to justify the use of the instrument. The researcher subjected the data generated for this study to appropriate statistical technique such as descriptive statistics to answer research questions. The result of the findings showed that “reduction of poverty and hunger” among others was the most prominent need for employment by the Local Government Chairmen by promoting agricultural development. It also revealed that “agribusiness” among other roles was the most prominent performed by Local Government Chairmen in creating employment for the rural youths in Akwa Ibom State. The study concluded that youth unemployment remains a major challenge in Akwa Ibom State, limiting development and deepening poverty. One of the recommendations made was that Local government chairmen should develop and implement policies that prioritize youth employment, such as incentives for small businesses, agricultural empowerment programs, and vocational training initiatives.

Keywords: Local Government Chairmen, Employment, Rural Youths and AkwaIbom State

Introduction

Unemployment remains one of the most pressing challenges in Nigeria, particularly in rural areas where economic opportunities are limited. In AkwaIbom State, a region rich in natural resources and human potential, youth unemployment continues to stifle development and exacerbate poverty. Local governments, being the closest tier of administration to the grassroots, have a significant role to play in addressing this issue. The local government chairmen, as the chief executives of their respective councils, are responsible for initiating policies and programmes that foster job creation. Their leadership can transform rural economies by harnessing local resources, fostering entrepreneurship, and facilitating skill development programmes (Ibietanm and Ndukwe, 2014).

The importance of employment generation at the local level cannot be overstated. Research has shown that local economic development strategies are most effective when they are tailored to

the unique needs of a given area. In Akwa Ibom State, many rural youths lack access to formal employment due to low industrialisation and inadequate infrastructure (Akpan, Ibok, Ibanga, and Atakpa, 2023). As a result, they are often forced into informal and subsistence-level occupations with minimal financial returns. The role of local government chairmen, therefore, extends beyond routine administration; it involves formulating policies that promote rural industrialisation, vocational training, and business incubation centres (Ibietanm and Ndukwe, 2014). These interventions are crucial in equipping young people with the skills and opportunities necessary to participate actively in economic activities.

Local government chairmen can also leverage the state's agricultural potential to create sustainable employment. Agriculture remains a dominant sector in Akwa Ibom, and well-designed agricultural programmes can serve as a viable solution to youth unemployment. Through initiatives such as mechanised farming, cooperative societies, and agro-processing enterprises, local governments can create value chains that absorb young people into productive work. Additionally, partnerships with private investors and non-governmental organisations can facilitate access to modern farming technologies, grants, and training programmes, further expanding job opportunities for rural youths.

Infrastructure development is another crucial aspect of employment creation. Poor road networks, erratic power supply, and limited access to financial institutions hinder business growth and discourage investment in rural areas (Olorunfemi, 2020). Local government chairmen, in collaboration with state and federal agencies, can improve infrastructure to attract businesses and industries to their communities. Providing essential facilities such as markets, industrial clusters, and digital hubs can stimulate entrepreneurship and enhance the rural economy. When local governments create a conducive environment for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), young people can establish businesses that generate wealth and reduce dependency on government jobs.

Furthermore, skills acquisition and entrepreneurial development programmes are critical for equipping rural youths with marketable skills. Vocational training in trades such as carpentry, tailoring, welding, and ICT can significantly reduce unemployment rates in Akwa Ibom State. Local government chairmen can initiate youth empowerment schemes that provide start-up grants, mentorship programmes, and business development training. These initiatives not only create self-employment opportunities but also contribute to the economic diversification of rural areas. By fostering innovation and creativity among young people, local governments can ensure sustainable job creation that aligns with global economic trends.

The role of local government chairmen in employment creation for rural youths in Akwa Ibom State is both strategic and essential. By promoting rural industrialisation, enhancing agricultural productivity, developing infrastructure, and investing in vocational training, they can significantly reduce unemployment. Effective leadership at the local government level is crucial for translating policy frameworks into tangible economic opportunities. With a well-structured approach, rural youth can transition from job seekers to job creators, fostering inclusive development and economic stability in Akwa Ibom State.

Statement of the Problem

The increase in crime among youths has been linked to many factors such as lack of employment which affects the growth and development of the country. Employment can help or hurt the youth achievement and wellbeing. Lack of employment can bring about poverty and

increase the crime rate in the society. Certain things may cause lack of employment among youths which may likely be unavailability of working materials, gender discrimination, economic fluctuation, population growth. This study sought to examine the needs for Local Government in creating employment for rural youths in Akwa Ibom State.

Objectives of the Study

The objective of the study was to:

- i. Examine the needs for creation of employment opportunities for the rural dwellers by Local Government Chairmen in Local Government Areas.
- ii. Examine the roles of Local Government Chairmen in creating employment for the rural youths in Akwa Ibom State.

Research Questions

- i. What are the needs for creation of employment opportunities for the rural dwellers by Local Government Chairmen in Local Government Areas?
- ii. What are the roles of Local Government Chairmen play in creating employment for the rural youths?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Employment

Employment refers to the act of engaging in work or being employed by an organisation or individual in order to contribute to the production of goods and services. It serves as a means of distributing wealth and providing purchasing power to workers through wages. Additionally, employment plays a crucial role in society by offering a social environment, enhancing self-esteem, and fostering engagement among individuals.

Employment, at its core, is a formal agreement where an individual (the employee) provides labour or services in exchange for compensation (wages, salary, or benefits) from an employer. Employment definition is termed as a paid mutual work arrangement between a recruiter and an employee. This term applies to an individual who is hired for a salary or compensation to initiate work or tasks for an organisation.

According to Toppr (2025), employment refers to the state of having a job or being employed. If one has to employ someone, they must pay them. The person who hires people is known as the employer, and the person who is getting paid for providing the services is known as the employee. Employers may include individuals, businesses, etc. People can work for themselves and run their own businesses as self-employed individuals.

Concept of Local Government Administrator

A local government administrator is a public official who manages the administrative, financial, and human resources of a local government, ensuring the smooth functioning of local services and citizen engagement. A local government administrator is a person who promotes

democratic rule in the society. This is because local government administration is the closest level of government to the people, and as such, it provides the opportunity for the people to further learn the democratic values and norms.

A local government administrator is a government official responsible for managing the affairs of a local government area (LGA). They oversee the implementation of policies, coordinate developmental projects, and ensure the efficient delivery of public services to residents within their jurisdiction. Their role includes supervising local government staff, managing budgets, enforcing laws, and ensuring that local policies align with state and federal regulations. Local government administrators also serve as a bridge between the government and the people, addressing community concerns and working to improve the socio-economic conditions of their locality.

In addition to administrative functions, a local government administrator plays a vital role in promoting grassroots development by initiating programmes in areas such as education, healthcare, sanitation, and infrastructure (Akindele and Olaopa, 2021). They also facilitate employment opportunities by supporting small businesses, encouraging investment, and implementing skill development programmes. Their leadership is crucial for maintaining peace, order, and efficient governance at the local level, ensuring that the needs of the community are met effectively.

The Prevalence of Unemployment in the Rural Areas of Akwa Ibom State

Unemployment and underemployment rates vary across Nigerian states due to the nature of economic activities predominant in each region. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2020), the national unemployment rate during Q2 2020 stood at 27.1%, up from 23.1% in Q3 2018. Similarly, the underemployment rate increased from 20.1% in Q3 2018 to 28.6% in Q2 2020. Among young people (ages 15-34), the unemployment rate rose from 29.7% in Q3 2018 to 34.9% in Q2 2020, while the underemployment rate increased from 25.7% to 28.2% within the same period. These figures were the highest among all age groups, highlighting the severity of youth unemployment in the country.

A state-level analysis further underscores the depth of the crisis. In Q2 2020, Akwa Ibom recorded the second highest number of unemployment at 45.2% (Ita&Bassey, 2022). Notably, in Q3 2018, Akwa Ibom had the highest unemployment rate in its region at 37.7%, a slight decline from 37.91% in Q3 2017. During this period, the underemployment rate in the state stood at 20.1%, reflecting a 1.33 percentage point increase from the previous year. The state's labour force population also grew to 3,599,981, an increase of 300,163 compared to Q3 2017. Despite this, the total number of employed individuals—both full-time and underemployed—only increased by 154,692 during the same period (Edem, 2019). The South-South region, Akwa Ibom, has consistently recorded some of the highest unemployment rates in Nigeria. While Akwa Ibom State's population stood at around 7 million, growing at an annual rate of 3.5%.

The Needs for Employment by Local Government Chairmen in Local Government Area

Local government chairmen play a crucial role in governance at the grassroots level, and one of their key responsibilities is to create employment opportunities within their jurisdiction. The need for employment at the local government level is essential for economic, social, and political development. Below are six major reasons why employment creation is necessary for Local Government Areas (LGAs):

Reduction of Poverty and Hunger: Unemployment is a major cause of poverty in many local communities. When residents do not have stable jobs, they struggle to afford basic necessities such as food, shelter, healthcare, and education. By providing employment opportunities, local government chairmen can help improve the standard of living of their people, ensuring they have a steady income to meet their daily needs.

Economic Growth and Development: A thriving economy starts at the local level. When people are employed, they have more purchasing power, which boosts local businesses and increases economic activities. This, in turn, leads to more revenue for the local government through taxes and levies. A strong local economy also attracts investors, further enhancing development in the community.

Reduction of Crime and Social Vices: Unemployment is a major contributor to crime, drug abuse, prostitution, and other social vices. When youths and able-bodied individuals do not have jobs, they may resort to illegal activities to survive. By creating employment opportunities, local government chairmen can help reduce crime rates and promote peace and stability within their communities.

Reduction of Rural-Urban Migration: Many young people leave their villages and small towns to search for jobs in cities, leading to overcrowding and excessive pressure on urban infrastructure. This migration also weakens rural economies and leaves many local communities underdeveloped. By creating jobs within the LGA, local government chairmen can encourage people to stay and contribute to their communities' growth.

Skill Development and Human Capital Growth: Employment opportunities allow people to develop new skills and gain work experience, which enhances their productivity and future career prospects. Local governments can also invest in vocational training and entrepreneurship programmes to equip people with the skills needed for self-employment. This will create a workforce that is competitive and capable of driving development in the community.

Enhancement of Social and Political Stability: When people are employed, they tend to have a sense of purpose and belonging in their society. Joblessness often leads to frustration, protests, and political instability. Providing employment opportunities helps in maintaining peace, encouraging civic engagement, and promoting trust in government. Local government chairmen who prioritise employment creation can foster a stable political environment where citizens are more supportive of government policies and initiatives.

The Roles of Local Government Chairmen in Creating Employment for the Rural Youths in AkwaIbom State

Local Government Chairmen in AkwaIbom State play a critical role in fostering employment opportunities, particularly for rural youths. As mentioned by Daniel (2019) as the closest tier of government to the people, the local government chairman have the responsibility to implement policies and programs that will reduce unemployment, improve living standards, and drive economic development in their communities. Below are the key roles they play in employment creation:

Promoting Agricultural Development and Agribusiness: Agriculture is one of the major economic activities in Akwalbom State, with fertile land suitable for farming, fishing, and livestock production. Local Government Chairmen can:

- Provide farm inputs such as fertilizers, improved seeds, and modern farming tools to youths.
- Organize training programs on modern agricultural techniques and agribusiness.
- Establish cooperative societies that give rural youths access to credit facilities for farming.
- Encourage commercial farming and link rural farmers to markets for their produce.

Establishing Vocational and Skills Acquisition Programs: Many rural youths lack formal education or employable skills. To address this, Local Government Chairmen can:

- Set up vocational training centers where youths can learn trades such as welding, tailoring, hairdressing, carpentry, and automobile repairs.
- Partner with state and federal agencies to organize entrepreneurship workshops.
- Provide startup grants or soft loans to trained youths to help them start their own businesses.

Encouraging Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and Entrepreneurship: Supporting small businesses is key to job creation. Local Government Chairmen can:

- Provide financial support and incentives such as tax exemptions for local entrepreneurs.
- Facilitate access to microfinance loans for youths who want to start small businesses.
- Create business incubation hubs to support startups and innovations.
- Organize trade fairs where youths can showcase their locally made products.

Promoting Public Works and Infrastructure Development: Infrastructure projects not only develop communities but also create job opportunities. Local Government Chairmen can:

- Initiate road construction and maintenance projects, employing rural youths as laborers, engineers, and contractors.
- Establish environmental sanitation programs that engage youths in waste management and cleaning services.
- Develop community-based projects such as rural electrification and borehole drilling, creating short-term and long-term jobs.

Attracting Investments and Public-Private Partnerships (PPP): Local Government Chairmen can encourage investment in rural areas by:

- Partnering with private companies to set up industries that will employ local youths.
- Providing incentives such as tax reliefs and land grants to investors willing to establish businesses in the local government area.
- Facilitating dialogue between rural communities and multinational companies operating in Akwalbom, ensuring job opportunities for local youths.

Supporting Digital and Technological Skills Development: As the world moves towards digital transformation, rural youths need to acquire technological skills. Local Government Chairmen can:

- Establish ICT training centers where youths can learn computer programming, graphic design, and online business strategies.
- Provide free internet access in strategic locations to encourage e-learning and online job opportunities.
- Organize seminars on digital marketing, freelancing, and remote work opportunities for rural youths.

Encouraging Youth Participation in Government Programs and Decision-Making: Youths should be actively involved in governance and policy-making to ensure their needs are addressed. Local Government Chairmen can:

- Create youth advisory councils to engage young people in employment policies.
- Support youth-focused programs such as NYSC community development projects.
- Encourage youths to take up leadership roles in local governance and cooperative societies.

Supporting Tourism and Cultural Development: Akwa Ibom State is rich in cultural heritage and tourism potential. Local Government Chairmen can:

- Develop tourism sites and promote cultural festivals, creating employment for tour guides, event organizers, and entertainers.
- Train youths in hospitality management and tourism-related businesses.
- Partner with travel agencies to attract tourists, boosting the local economy.

Methodology

Descriptive design was adopted to carry out this research in Akwa Ibom State. The targeted population for the study comprised all unemployed and employed youths in Akwa Ibom State. Stratified Sample technique was used to 15 unemployed youths in Eket, Uyo, and Ikot Ekpene senatorial district, and 25 employed youths in Eket, Uyo, and Ikot Ekpene senatorial district, in Akwa Ibom State which formed the sample size of 120 used to carry out this research. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled “Local Government Chairmen and Employment Creation Questionnaire (LGCECQ)”. Face and content validation of the instrument was carried out by an expert in test, measurement, and evaluation in order to ensure that the instrument has the accuracy, appropriateness, and completeness for the study under consideration. The reliability coefficient obtained was 0.91, and this was high enough to justify the use of the instrument. The researcher subjected the data generated for this study to appropriate statistical technique such as descriptive statistics to answer research questions.

Table 1:

Percentage Analysis of the needs for creation of employment opportunities for the rural dwellers by Local Government Chairmen

NEEDS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Reduction of Poverty and Hunger	39	32.5**
Economic Growth and Development	26	21.7
Reduction of Crime and Social Vices	15	12.5
Reduction of Rural – Urban Migration	11	9.2
Skill Development and Human Capital Growth	21	17.5
Enhancement of Social and Political Stability	8	6.7*
TOTAL	120	100%

** The highest percentage frequency

* The least percentage frequency

SOURCE: Field Survey

The above table 1 presents the percentage analysis of the needs for creation of employment opportunities for the rural dwellers by Local Government Chairmen. From the result of the data analysis, it was observed that the need tagged “Reduction of Poverty and Hunger” 39(32.5%) was the most prominent needs for employment in Local Government Areas, while the least was “Enhancement of Social and Political Stability” 8(6.7%). The result therefore is in agreement with the research findings by many scholars that the need for employment at the local government level is essential for economic, social, and political development in other to reduce poverty and hunger, rural-urban migration, high rate of crime and social vices.

Research Questions 2: The research question sought to find out the roles of Local Government Chairmen in creating employment for the rural youths in Akwa Ibom State. To answer the research question, percentage analysis was performed on the data, (see table 2).

Table 2:

The roles of Local Government Chairmen in creating employment for the rural youths in Akwa Ibom State

ROLES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Promoting Agricultural Development and Agribusiness	19	15.8
Establishing Vocational and Skills Acquisition Programs	21	17.5
Encouraging Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and Entrepreneurship	41	34.2**
Promoting Public Works and Infrastructure Development	6	5
Attracting Investments and Public – Private Partnerships (PPP)	16	13.3
Supporting Digital and Technological Skills Development	11	9.2
Encouraging Youth Participation in Government Programs And Decision Making	4	3.3
Supporting Tourism and Cultural Development	2	1.7*
TOTAL	120	100%

**** The highest percentage frequency**

*** The least percentage frequency**

The above table 2 presents the percentage analysis of the roles of Local Government Chairmen in creating employment for the rural youths in Akwa Ibom State. From the result of the data analysis, it was observed that the role tagged “Encouraging Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and Entrepreneurship 41(34.2%) was rated the highest roles performed by Local Government in creating employment for the rural youths, while “Supporting Tourism and Cultural Development” 2(1.7%) was rated the least. The result therefore is in agreement with the research findings of Daniel (2019) who says that the local government chairman have the responsibility to implement policies and programs that will reduce unemployment, improve living standards, and drive economic development in their communities.

Conclusion

Youth unemployment remains a major challenge in Akwa Ibom State, limiting development and deepening poverty. Local government chairmen play a crucial role in addressing this issue by fostering job creation through rural industrialisation, entrepreneurship, and skill development. Leveraging agriculture, improving infrastructure, and supporting small businesses can significantly enhance employment opportunities. Vocational training and empowerment programmes further equip youths with marketable skills. With strategic leadership and well-structured policies, local governments can transform rural economies, reducing unemployment and promoting sustainable development. By turning job seekers into job creators, they can ensure long-term economic stability in Akwa Ibom State. The result of the findings shows that reduction of

poverty and hunger among others is the most prominent needs for employment by the Local Government Chairmen by promoting agricultural development and agribusiness among others to the youths as the highest roles to be performed by Local Government Chairmen.

Recommendations

- i. Local government chairmen should develop and implement policies that prioritise youth employment, such as incentives for small businesses, agricultural empowerment programmes, and vocational training initiatives.
- ii. Improved road networks, stable electricity, and digital connectivity are essential for attracting investments and fostering entrepreneurship. Local governments should collaborate with state and federal agencies to develop industrial clusters, markets, and financial support schemes that enable rural youths to establish and sustain businesses.
- iii. To maximise employment opportunities, local government chairmen should engage private investors, NGOs, and international organisations in job creation initiatives. By facilitating access to funding, modern technology, and training, these partnerships can drive sustainable economic growth and empower rural youths in Akwa Ibom State.

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