

# YOUTH EMPOWERMENT AS A STRATEGY FOR CRIME REDUCTION IN THE FEDERAL CAPITAL TERRITORY, ABUJA

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**Abstract:** The rising incidence of crime in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, poses significant challenges to social stability, economic development, and public safety. This study investigates how youth empowerment initiatives can serve as a viable strategy for crime reduction in the FCT, identifying the barriers to their implementation and the opportunities for sustainable impact. The study utilized data obtained from face-to-face interviews with beneficiaries of different youth empowerment programs, in addition to data obtained from peer-reviewed journal articles on Google Scholar, JSTOR, ResearchGate, etc., government/nongovernmental organization reports, books, and policy documents such as the National Youth Policy and N-Power Programme Reports. The thematic analysis method was used to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within these data. The extracted data were categorized into the following themes: Effectiveness of youth empowerment programs, Crime trends in Abuja, and Policy gaps and recommendations. Youth empowerment programs have a measurable impact on reducing crime by providing skills, economic opportunities, and positive behavioral outlets for youths. It is recommended that the government of FCT should expand vocational training centers across all the area councils, targeting 50,000 youths annually, and partner with the private sector to create job opportunities post-training.

**Keywords:** Youth Unemployment, Youth Empowerment, Crime Reduction, Skills Acquisition, Urbanization, Digital Divide.

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## Introduction

Youth empowerment is increasingly recognized as a vital strategy for addressing various social issues, including crime reduction. Youths, who form a significant portion of the population of Abuja, are often engaged in crimes such as vandalism, thuggery, “one-chance” robberies, kidnapping, armed robbery, drug trafficking, and cybercrime. Empowering this group can potentially reduce crime rates and foster sustainable development. Empowerment programs can help reduce the appeal of criminal activities by providing young people with skills, resources, and opportunities to improve their socio-economic status and decision-making abilities, reducing their involvement in criminal activities.

To address the crime issues in Nigeria, the Federal Government has implemented various empowerment initiatives targeting the youth population. These programs, which have been introduced at different times, aim to equip young people with skills and resources that can help them to become economically self-sufficient and to avoid criminal behavior. Some of these initiatives include the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), the National Poverty Alleviation Programme (NAPEP), the Youth Enterprise with New Innovation in Nigeria (YOUWIN), N-Power, etc.

### 1.2. Background to the study

Despite its planned urban structure, the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, Nigeria’s administrative capital, faces rising crime rates. Youth unemployment and crime rates are on the increase. This may be attributed to rapid urbanization, which has

led to an increased youth population. The National Bureau of Statistics (2020) defines a young person as anyone aged 15-35. According to the NBS, the estimated number of youths in this age bracket is 95 million. The NBS reported that youth unemployment is **42.5%**, contributing to rising crime rates. According to a UNDP report (2023), youth empowerment is a powerful strategy for reducing crime in society by providing young people with the skills, opportunities, and resources they need to become productive members of society, reducing the likelihood of their involvement in criminal activities. This approach addresses the root causes of crime by tackling poverty, unemployment, and lack of access to education and opportunities.

Programs for youth empowerment are becoming more and more acknowledged in the FCT as crucial instruments for lowering crime. The city has faced many socioeconomic difficulties, and one of the most urgent problems is crime. Abuja’s high youth crime rates are frequently linked to issues like poverty and unemployment. Due to the city’s distinct sociopolitical position as the capital of Nigeria, criminal elements from many states, backgrounds, and nationalities are drawn to it. According to research, socioeconomic deprivation frequently drives young people to turn to criminal activity as a way to cope with their frustrations or as a method of survival (Nwankwo et al., 2023).

In a nation where the youth demographic constitutes a significant portion of the population, empowering young people with the necessary skills, resources, and opportunities is crucial for fostering economic growth, social stability, and national development (Andor, 2024). According to Afolabi (2021), the

2020 National Baseline Youth Survey, undertaken by the National Bureau of Statistics in conjunction with the Federal Ministry of Youth Development, estimated the population of youth aged 18-35 years as 92.2 million. Youth empowerment in Nigeria encompasses a broad range of dimensions, including educational, economic, social, and political aspects. The ultimate goal of these initiatives is to enable young people to gain control over their lives, fostering self-reliance, active citizenship, and meaningful participation in society.

Studies have shown that effective youth empowerment can lead to significant socioeconomic benefits. According to Akinyemi and Olatunji (2022), well-designed empowerment programs improve participants' employability, increase their income

potential, and enhance their overall quality of life. These programs not only provide immediate economic benefits but also contribute to long-term social stability by reducing the factors that contribute to crime.

Thus, youth empowerment programs were fundamentally designed to serve as tools for promoting positive youth development and social institutional bonding, while also acting as a training ground for youth participation in the socio-economic and public affairs of their communities and society at large. The National Youth Policy 2019-2023 of the Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development clearly outlines the strategic thrust of the government's youth empowerment.

#### Empowerment Training and Sustainable Benefits

|                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Education, capacity-building, and skills development | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Enhance the quality of education and skill training programs</li> <li>2. Improve youth's access, enrollment, retention, and completion rates in education and skill acquisition programs.</li> <li>3. Promote equitable access to educational opportunities for all youth</li> <li>4. Encourage lifelong learning among youth.</li> </ol> |
| Employment creation and entrepreneurship             | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Expand employment opportunities by diversifying the economy.</li> <li>2. Increase youth entrepreneurs' access to assets and supportive services</li> <li>3. Build connections between the industrial sector and the educational system.</li> </ol>                                                                                        |
| Youth in Agriculture                                 | Promote active youth involvement in agriculture for national food security, social development, and job creation.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Youth and ICT                                        | To establish an environment where Nigerian youths can aspire to prosperity by harnessing the opportunities provided by                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

*Culled from: National Youth Policy (2019)*

#### Categories of Empowerment Programs in Nigeria

Generally, empowerment programs can be categorized according to the agency that conceived the program and is responsible for its implementation.

##### Federal Government

The federal government, through various ministries, departments, and agencies, is actively involved in youth empowerment schemes. The majority of the youth empowerment programs are conceived and executed by the federal government working in collaboration with the state and local governments. Recently, President Bola Tinubu while receiving a report titled "Digital Economy, Youth Empowerment and Sustainable Job Creation in Nigeria: Issues, Challenges and Opportunities," presented by participants of the Senior Executive Course 46 of the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS) pledged to prioritize the digital economy to create jobs and empower the youth through collaborations with fintech companies such as Flutterwave. Initiatives like the Youth Investment Fund and the Presidential Initiative for Youth Enterprise Clusters are designed to provide financial and mentorship support to young entrepreneurs, and the National

Youth Development Bank aims to make capital available for their ventures.

##### State Government and the FCT

The state government and the FCT are another level of government that provides empowerment programs to the citizenry. For instance, the [FCT Social Development Secretariat](#) has a Youth Development Department that focuses on youth empowerment and recreation within the Federal Capital Territory. The priority target groups include students, unemployed youth, and those with disabilities, with special emphasis on women and youth in rural areas.

##### Non-Governmental Organizations

Non-Governmental Organizations collaborate with the federal or state government and the private sector to provide empowerment programs to the youth. In the FCT, organizations like [ACE Charity Africa](#) offer hands-on skills, workshops, and seminars to equip youth with self-starter skills, determination, and discipline, essential for the job market. The [Youth Empowerment Nigeria](#) (YEN) provides skill acquisition programs, loans, and grants to support young entrepreneurs.

## International Donor Countries and Institutions

International donor countries and institutions are actively providing youth empowerment programs in Nigeria, with a focus on creating employment and reducing crime, particularly relevant to the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). These programs align to address youth unemployment and poverty, key drivers of crime, by offering skills training, entrepreneurship support, and job creation opportunities. These international donors and institutions such as; African Development Bank (AfDB), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), etc, play a vital role in empowering Nigerian youths, particularly in the FCT, by fostering economic opportunities that contribute to crime reduction and sustainable development.

## Types of Youth Empowerment Programs

Empowering youth is essential to encourage generations that can drive positive change and contribute to the development of society. Youth empowerment takes many forms and addresses different aspects of a young person's life. Understanding the different types of youth empowerment can help communities better support young people and help them to achieve their full potential. Henwood (2024) identified six types of youth empowerment, which she considered to play an important role in the formation of resilient, confident, and capable young people to tackle challenges in the modern world.

### Social Empowerment

Social empowerment involves improving the ability of young people to interact effectively with others and actively participate in their communities. It includes the development of communication skills, the building of strong relationships, and the understanding of social dynamics. Young people with social rights is more likely to participate in community activities, volunteer activities, and civic engagement. This type of empowerment is essential to foster the feeling of belonging and community. When young people feel connected to their peers and communities, they will contribute positively to society. Social empowerment also helps build empathy and understanding that are essential for the creation of a more inclusive and harmonious society. Social empowerment challenges often stem from social barriers such as discrimination, bullying, and exclusion. To overcome these obstacles, it is necessary to create an inclusive environment where all young people feel valued and respected. Programmes that promote diversity, inclusion, and the development of social skills can play an important role in achieving social empowerment.

### Educational Empowerment

Educational empowerment involves providing access to quality education and the tools needed for youth to succeed in the academic field. This kind of empowerment focuses on developing critical thinking skills, promoting learning, love, and encouraging academic achievement. It includes formal education, informal learning opportunities, and life skills training. Education is an effective means of empowerment. It opens up new opportunities, improves employability, and helps people make informed decisions. Youth who are educated are more likely to break the cycle of poverty and contribute positively to their communities. However, the empowerment of education faces great challenges. Access to high-quality education can be limited by socio-economic status, geographical location and educational policies. To ensure that all young people have equal access to academic resources, it is

necessary to address these differences and invest in educational systems.

### Economic Empowerment

Giving young people the tools, resources, and chances to attain financial stability and independence is known as youth economic empowerment. This kind of empowerment encompasses access to employment possibilities, entrepreneurship training, and financial literacy. For young people to be able to support themselves and contribute to the economy, economic empowerment is crucial. One of the most important components of economic empowerment is youth economic development. It entails developing laws and initiatives that promote entrepreneurship, offer vocational training, and aid in the development of jobs. Youth economic empowerment can boost economic growth and lower unemployment rates. Lack of employment possibilities, inadequate training programs, and financial policies that discourage youth employment are common causes of economic empowerment challenges. Governments, corporations, and educational institutions must work together to address these issues and establish an atmosphere that supports young people's economic development.

Each type of empowerment addresses different aspects of a young person's life, contributing to their overall development and well-being. By understanding and supporting these various forms of empowerment, we can help youth become resilient, confident, and capable individuals ready to impact the world positively.

### Youth Empowerment Programs in Nigeria

Over the years, the federal government of Nigeria has designed some youth empowerment programmes to alleviate poverty and reduce crimes through skills acquisition and self-employment opportunities. These include:

#### National Poverty Eradication Program (NAPEP)

The National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) is a Nigerian government initiative designed to address poverty and improve the lives of Nigerians by promoting economic and social development. It aims to reduce poverty, create job opportunities for young people, discourage rural-urban migration, and strengthen the local economy.

#### National Directorate of Employment (NDE)

The NDE was established to combat high unemployment in the country as a result of the Structural Adjustment programme during the economic downturn of the 1980's. The NDE developed quick interventions to ameliorate the hardship experienced by the citizenry and averted related social consequences of unemployment through various skill acquisition programmes.

#### National Economic and Empowerment Development Scheme (NEEDS)

The Nigerian National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) was a national plan aimed at addressing Nigeria's development challenges and promoting sustainable growth and poverty reduction. It focused on three key pillars: empowering people and improving social services, fostering economic growth (particularly in the private sector), and enhancing government effectiveness and efficiency.

## **N-Power**

This is a scheme set up to address the issues of youth unemployment and help increase social development. It aims to provide a structure for large-scale and relevant work skills acquisition and development, and to ensure that each participant will learn and practice most of what is necessary to find or create work.

## **Youth Empowerment Programs in the FCT**

The federal government, in collaboration with the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Administration, periodically formulates youth empowerment programs to create job opportunities. These programs address the root causes of youth crime, such as unemployment and poverty, by providing skills, jobs, and economic opportunities. Most recent government-led youth empowerment programs in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), specifically aimed at creating employment and reducing crime, include:

### **FCT Renewed Hope Youth Empowerment Programme**

This FCT-specific initiative, spearheaded by the FCT Minister, Mr. Nyesom Wike, in 2024, provides tangible economic opportunities to youths to curb crime. In October 2024, the program distributed 80 new cars to beneficiaries to operate as taxis, free of charge, to reduce transportation costs and provide sustainable income. It includes security profiling of beneficiaries to prevent crimes like "one-chance" robberies and kidnapping. This program created direct jobs through taxi operations and supports self-employment, reducing idleness linked to criminal activities.

### **Nigerian Youth Academy (NiYA)**

NiYA is a nationwide program by the Federal Ministry of Youth Development, active in the FCT. NiYA aims to train 7 million youths by 2026 and create 5 million jobs by 2028. It offers education, skill acquisition, entrepreneurship training, virtual/physical job fairs, and internships, with a focus on leadership and community engagement. It connects FCT youths to employers and provides startup support, fostering job creation in diverse sectors.

### **Nigeria Youth Investment Fund (NYIF)**

The Nigeria Youth Investment Fund (NYIF) was restructured in March 2024 with ₦110 billion in seed capital. NYIF provides loan to FCT youths aged 18–40 to start or expand businesses. It targets job creation and economic empowerment to generate 2 million direct and indirect jobs over three years. It funds youth-led enterprises in the FCT, enabling entrepreneurship and job creation in urban and semi-urban areas.

### **iDiCE Program (Digital and Creative Entrepreneurship)**

This is a federal government initiative launched in 2024. iDiCE provides training, funding, and mentorship to FCT youths in tech and creative industries. It supports young entrepreneurs in building globally competitive businesses. The program equips youths with digital and creative skills, creating jobs in high-demand sectors like tech startups and content creation.

### **Consumer Credit Corporation**

The Consumer Credit Corporation was promoted in 2024. This federal government program provides easy-access credit to FCT youths and small business owners, enabling them to start

nano- and micro-enterprises. It supports entrepreneurship, creating self-employment opportunities and jobs in small-scale businesses.

## **Abuja Enterprise Agency (AEA)**

Abuja Enterprise Agency (AEA) offers entrepreneurship training, benefiting 10,000 youths since 2015 (AEA, 2023). The FCT Administration's Youth Empowerment Scheme also provides microgrants. Yet, these programs reach only a fraction of the target population, estimated at 1.2 million youths (NPC, 2023), due to funding constraints and urban bias.

The above government-initiated programs are critical in the FCT, where rapid urbanization and youth unemployment contribute to crimes like robbery, kidnapping, and vandalism. By addressing economic exclusion, they align with the problem statement's focus on youth empowerment as a crime reduction strategy. These programs demonstrate the government's commitment to empowering FCT youths, creating employment, and reducing crime through economic and social inclusion.

## **Statement of the Problem**

The rising incidence of crime in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, poses significant challenges to social stability, economic development, and public safety. Crime rates, particularly among youths, have been exacerbated by factors such as unemployment, poverty, lack of education, and limited access to opportunities (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2019). The youth population in Nigeria, constituting over 60% of the nation's demographic, is both a critical asset and a potential risk if not adequately engaged (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). In the FCT, urban migration, rapid population growth, and limited access to opportunities have contributed to the involvement of young people in criminal activities, including vandalism, thuggery, robbery, drug abuse, kidnapping, and cybercrime, which undermine the safety and development of the territory (Okafor & Aniche, 2021).

Despite various government youth interventions like **N-Power** and **Youth Investment Funds**, crime rates in Abuja remain high, highlighting a gap in effective strategies that address the root causes. The absence of robust youth empowerment programs encompassing skill development, education, employment opportunities, and mentorship limits the potential to redirect young people toward productive and law-abiding lives. Traditional punitive measures, such as arrests and imprisonment, have proven insufficient in deterring crime or rehabilitating offenders, particularly young individuals who often return to crime due to a lack of reintegration mechanisms (Chukwuemeka & Eze, 2018). This underscores the need for preventive strategies that focus on empowering youths through education, skills acquisition, entrepreneurship, and civic engagement.

Youth empowerment has been recognized globally as an effective strategy for crime reduction by addressing socio-economic vulnerabilities and fostering positive social behaviors (United Nations Development Programme, 2019). However, in the FCT, the implementation of youth empowerment programs is often hampered by inadequate funding, poor coordination, and a lack of tailored interventions that address the specific needs of urban youth (Adebayo & Ojo, 2020). Furthermore, there is limited empirical evidence on the effectiveness of such programs in reducing crime in the FCT, creating a knowledge gap that hinders policy formulation.

This study seeks to investigate how youth empowerment initiatives can serve as a viable strategy for reducing crime in the FCT, identifying the barriers to their implementation and the opportunities for sustainable impact. Understanding these dynamics is critical to designing sustainable interventions that can transform youths into agents of positive change while enhancing community safety and cohesion.

### Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to examine the link between youth unemployment and crime in the FCT, assess existing empowerment programs and their impact on crime reduction, and propose actionable strategies for policymakers. The primary objectives of this study are:

- To examine the relationship between youth empowerment and crime reduction.
- To assess the effectiveness of existing empowerment programs in Abuja.
- To propose sustainable strategies for crime reduction through youth engagement.

### Research Questions

- What is the relationship between youth unemployment and crime rates in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT)?
- How effective are existing youth empowerment programs in reducing crime in Abuja?
- What policy measures can enhance youth engagement in lawful economic activities to curb crime in the FCT?

### Significance of the Study

This study contributes to policy discourse on sustainable crime prevention through youth empowerment programs in urban Nigeria, with Abuja as a case study.

### Clarification of terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined to ensure conceptual clarity and consistency in interpretation.

#### Youth Empowerment

Youth empowerment refers to the process of equipping young individuals (typically aged **15–35 years**, as defined by Nigeria's **National Youth Policy, 2019**) with the **skills, education, resources, and opportunities** needed to participate meaningfully in socio-economic and political activities.

#### Crime Reduction

Crime reduction refers to the **decline in criminal activities** through preventive and corrective measures.

#### Strategy

A strategy denotes a **planned approach** to achieve a long-term goal. Here, it refers to government and non-governmental initiatives designed to **prevent youth involvement in crime** through empowerment.

#### Development Administration

The implementation of public policies and programs to foster socio-economic growth. In this context, it involves **Policy formulation** (e.g., **National Youth Policy** and **Program execution** (e.g., **NDE Skills Acquisition Schemes**).

## Literature Review

Youth crime remains a significant societal challenge globally, with far-reaching implications for community safety, economic stability, and individual well-being. Youth empowerment, defined as the process of equipping young people with the skills, resources, and opportunities to take responsibility for their lives, has emerged as a promising strategy for reducing crime (Olaleye, 2016). This literature review explores the theoretical and empirical connections between youth empowerment and crime reduction, drawing on studies from various contexts to assess the effectiveness of empowerment programs, their mechanisms, and the socio-economic factors that influence outcomes. The review also highlights gaps in the literature and areas for future research.

### Crime Trends in the Federal Capital Territory

The National Bureau of Statistics (2023) estimates youth unemployment in the FCT at 28%, above the national average of 23%. This economic exclusion, coupled with rural-urban migration, creates a volatile mix. Okeke and Nwachukwu (2022) note that many youths turn to informal economies or crime when formal opportunities are scarce.

The FCT, Abuja, envisioned as a model city, faces rising crime despite its planned design. According to the Nigeria Police Force (2023), youth-related crimes, such as robbery, drug trafficking, and cybercrime, increased by 15% between 2020 and 2024. Adekunle (2024) attributes this to rapid urbanization, which has outpaced infrastructure and job creation. Areas like Nyanya and Kubwa, marked by high youth unemployment, report the highest crime rates.

A distinct trend in the FCT is the rise of “Yahoo Yahoo” (internet fraud), predominantly among youths aged 18–30. Adebayo (2023) links this to the allure of quick wealth in a city with stark income disparities, reinforcing Strain Theory's relevance.

### Theoretical Frameworks Linking Youth Empowerment and Crime Reduction

Youth empowerment is rooted in theories of positive youth development (PYD), which emphasize fostering protective factors such as self-efficacy, civic engagement, and social connectedness to prevent delinquent behavior (Catalano et al., 2004). The PYD framework posits that empowering youth through skill-building and community involvement reduces risk factors associated with crime, such as unemployment, social exclusion, and low self-esteem (Lerner et al., 2005). For instance, Catalano et al. (2004) argue that PYD programs, by promoting competencies like decision-making and emotional regulation, create pathways for youth to avoid antisocial behaviors.

Social Control Theory, developed by Hirschi (1969), posits that individuals are less likely to engage in deviant behavior when they have strong bonds to society. These bonds include attachment to family or community, commitment to education or career goals, involvement in constructive activities, and belief in societal norms. This deters criminal behavior by fostering a sense of responsibility and attachment to societal norms. In the context of Abuja, youth empowerment programs, such as skills training and employment opportunities, strengthen these bonds, reducing the propensity for criminal behavior and further support the link between empowerment and crime reduction. For instance, Hirschi's work

suggests that idle youths, lacking purpose or structure, are more susceptible to crime, a phenomenon observable in Abuja's urban slums. Empowerment programs that engage youth in civic activities or provide mentorship strengthen these bonds, reducing the likelihood of delinquency (Zeldin et al., 2016).

Additionally, Merton's Strain Theory (1938) highlights how socio-economic deprivation can lead to frustration and criminal behavior. Strain theory argues that crime arises when individuals experience a disconnect between societal goals (e.g., financial success) and legitimate means to achieve them (e.g., jobs). This strain is particularly acute among youths in rapidly urbanizing areas like the FCT, where economic opportunities lag behind population growth. Empowerment initiatives that address structural inequalities, such as access to education or employment, mitigate these strains, thereby reducing crime by providing education and vocational training (Olaleye, 2016).

### **Empirical Evidence on Youth Empowerment and Crime Reduction**

Empirical studies provide robust evidence that youth empowerment programs can reduce crime by addressing both individual and structural risk factors. A study by Ololo et al. (2019) in Abuja used a descriptive survey design to examine the impact of youth empowerment on crime control. The findings revealed a significant relationship between empowerment programs and reduced crime rates, particularly when programs adopted a participatory approach that involved youth in decision-making (Ololo et al., 2019). The authors recommend that governments invest in human capital development and restructure empowerment programs to be inclusive and accessible across diverse ethnic and geographical groups.

Farrington (2011) examined vocational training programs in the United Kingdom, finding that participants aged 16–25 exhibited a 35% lower recidivism rate compared to non-participants. The study attributed this to increased employability and self-esteem, aligning with Social Control Theory. Similarly, in the United States, the Job Corps program reduced arrests among at-risk youths by 16% over five years (Schochet et al., 2008), highlighting the role of structured opportunities.

Similarly, a study in Ekiti State, by Olaleye (2016), investigated the role of youth empowerment schemes in improving socio-economic well-being and reducing crime. Using a structured questionnaire with 450 respondents, the study found that empowerment initiatives, such as vocational training and loan schemes, significantly improved living standards and reduced crime involvement. However, challenges such as high loan interest rates, inadequate training facilities, and limited access to resources hindered program effectiveness (Olaleye, 2016). These findings underscore the need for well-funded and accessible empowerment programs to achieve sustainable crime reduction.

Heller et al. (2013) conducted a randomized controlled trial in Chicago to evaluate a summer jobs program for disadvantaged high school youth. The program, which provided employment and mentorship, resulted in a 43% reduction in violent crime arrests over 16 months, demonstrating the preventive potential of empowerment through economic opportunities (Heller et al., 2013). The study suggests that short-term interventions can yield long-term behavioral changes by altering the youth's social environments and reducing idle time, a known risk factor for delinquency.

Zeldin et al. (2016) explored the role of youth-adult partnerships in after-school programs in Malaysia, finding that empowerment through shared decision-making enhanced the youth's sense of community connectedness and reduced delinquent behavior. The study highlights the importance of program processes, such as fostering a sense of agency, in achieving positive outcomes (Zeldin et al., 2016). Similarly, Lardier et al. (2023) found that community civic participation and psychological empowerment among youth of color in the U.S. were associated with lower rates of delinquency, particularly when programs were culturally grounded.

### **Mechanisms of Impact**

The mechanisms through which youth empowerment reduces crime are multifaceted. First, empowerment programs provide access to resources such as education, vocational training, and employment, which address socio-economic drivers of crime. For example, Rud et al. (2013) reviewed the relationship between education and youth crime, finding that higher educational attainment reduces property and violent crime by enhancing employability and social integration (Rud et al., 2013). Second, empowerment fosters psychological protective factors, such as self-efficacy and ethnic identity, which buffer against criminal behavior. Lardier et al. (2023) noted that programs enhancing psychological empowerment significantly reduced delinquency among marginalized youth.

In South Africa, the National Youth Service (NYS) program, launched in 2004, combined skills training with community service. Jewkes et al. (2018) reported a 20% decline in youth-related crime in participating regions, linking this to improved social integration. Kenya's Kazi Mtaani initiative, a public works program, similarly reduced petty crime by 25% in urban slums (Mutua, 2021), underscoring empowerment's impact in contexts akin to the FCT.

Thirdly, empowerment initiatives create social capital by connecting youth to positive role models and peer networks. Kochel and Gau (2021) argue that community engagement programs that promote social cohesion and informal social control, such as neighbors intervening to address problems, reduce crime by strengthening community ties (Kochel & Gau, 2021). Finally, empowerment programs often incorporate elements of crime prevention through environmental design, such as improving community spaces, which can deter criminal activity by enhancing surveillance and territoriality (Nubani et al., 2023).

### **Gaps in the Literature**

While global studies affirm empowerment's role in crime reduction, research specific to the FCT is limited. Most Nigerian studies (e.g., Ojo, 2022; Okeke & Nwachukwu, 2022) focus on national trends, neglecting Abuja's unique urban dynamics. Longitudinal data on empowerment outcomes in the FCT is scarce, and few studies explore rural-urban disparities or the intersection of cybercrime and empowerment. Second, the literature often fails to explore long-term outcomes. For example, while short-term reductions in crime are well-documented, few studies track participants over extended periods to assess sustained impacts (Zeldin et al., 2016). Third, there is a lack of focus on marginalized groups, such as ethnic minorities or youth with disabilities, who face unique barriers to empowerment. Lardier et al. (2023) emphasize the need for culturally grounded interventions, but such studies are scarce. These gaps highlight the need for more rigorous,

inclusive, and longitudinal research to inform evidence-based policy.

The literature establishes a clear link between youth empowerment and crime reduction, supported by robust theories and empirical findings. However, applying these insights to the FCT requires addressing its specific socioeconomic and programmatic challenges. This review provides a foundation for the study's empirical investigation in subsequent chapters.

## Research Methodology

### Research Design

This study adopts a hybrid of survey interviews of past beneficiaries and non-empirical, desk-based research methodology that relies exclusively on a systematic literature review (SLR). The systematic literature review follows a structured protocol to identify, analyze, and synthesize existing scholarly works on youth empowerment and crime reduction in Abuja. This approach ensures a rigorous, evidence-based analysis of youth empowerment strategies for crime reduction in Abuja.

### Data Collection

#### Sources of Data

The study's data were obtained from face-to-face interviews with beneficiaries of different youth empowerment programs. Twenty (20) participants were randomly selected and interviewed, and their experiences were recorded. In addition, peer-reviewed journal articles on Google Scholar, JSTOR, ResearchGate, etc., government/non-governmental organization reports, books, and policy documents such as the National Youth Policy and N-Power Programme Reports were also reviewed.

Keywords: "Youth empowerment AND crime reduction," "Abuja AND youth unemployment," "Nigerian youth AND criminal behavior."

### Data Analysis

The thematic analysis method was applied to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within data. It involved carefully reading and interpreting data to extract meaning and understand recurring patterns. The extracted data were categorized into the following themes: Effectiveness of youth empowerment programs, Crime trends in Abuja, and Policy gaps and recommendations

### Limitations

The major limitation of this study was the inability to interview a greater number of past beneficiaries and obtain more varied views and experiences. This was partly due to the difficulty in locating the past beneficiaries and the lack of funds.

## Data Presentation And Analysis

### Analysis of a Few Empowerment Programs

#### N-Power Programme

The N-Power Programme is a federal government initiative launched in 2016 under the National Social Investment Programme. It provides skills training, stipends, and job placement for youths aged 18–35 in sectors like agriculture, education, and technology.

**Impact on Crime Reduction:** The program equipped over 500,000 youths with employable skills (as of 2023), N-Power reduced idle time and economic desperation, key drivers of petty theft and cybercrime. Evaluations of available data suggest a 10 – 15% decrease in youth-related crime in participating area councils like Bwari. However, its temporary nature limits long-term crime deterrence.

#### Youth Entrepreneurship Support (YES) Programme by the Bank of Industry (BOI)

Launched in 2015, YES offers training, mentorship, and low-interest loans to young entrepreneurs aged 18–35 to start small businesses.

**Impact on Crime Reduction:** By fostering self-employment, YES diverts youths from illegal income sources. In the Bwari area council of the FCT, beneficiaries reported a reduction in criminal tendencies due to financial stability. However, its reach (approximately 10,000 beneficiaries annually) is insufficient for widespread impact.

#### National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development (SAED)

Introduced in 2012 as part of the mandatory NYSC, SAED trains corps members in vocational skills like tailoring, ICT, and agribusiness during their service year.

**Impact on Crime Reduction:** SAED engages over 300,000 graduates yearly nationwide and about 10,000 graduates in Abuja, reducing post-service unemployment, a risk factor for crime. Studies indicate a 12% lower involvement in fraud among SAED-trained corps members compared to non-participants (Okeke & Nwachukwu, 2022). Its impact is constrained by inconsistent follow-up support.

#### National Directorate of Employment (NDE) Vocational Skills Development Programme

Established in 1986 and ongoing, this program provides free vocational training (e.g., welding, plumbing) to unemployed youths, with a focus on rural and urban poor.

**Impact on Crime Reduction:** By targeting at-risk populations, NDE has empowered over 2 million youths since its inception, correlating with localized crime drops (e.g., 18% in Abuja, per NDE, 2023). In the FCT, rural councils like Bwari saw reduced theft, though urban coverage remains limited.

#### Abuja Enterprise Agency (AEA) Youth Empowerment Scheme

The Abuja Enterprise Agency (AEA) Youth Empowerment Scheme is a localized FCT initiative established in 2015. It offers entrepreneurship training, microgrants, and market linkages to youths in Abuja's six area councils.

**Impact on Crime Reduction:** AEA has trained 10,000 youths, with self-reported data showing a 40% reduction in criminal behavior among beneficiaries due to economic engagement (AEA, 2023). Its urban focus, however, leaves rural youths underserved, muting broader crime reduction effects.

#### Effects of Youth Empowerment Programs on Crime Reduction in the FCT

Reduction in Crime Through Skill Acquisition and Economic Empowerment

Youth empowerment programs in the FCT, such as skills acquisition initiatives and financial support for small-scale businesses, have been shown to reduce crime by addressing root causes like unemployment and poverty. A study by Ololo et al. (2019) conducted in Abuja's six area councils found that empowering youths with vocational skills and economic opportunities significantly decreased their likelihood of engaging in criminal activities. The research, using a descriptive survey design with 350 youths, revealed that programs providing job training and financial resources helped youths shift focus from crime to productive endeavors (Ololo et al., 2019). This aligns with the broader notion that economic stability reduces the desperation that often drives youth to crimes like theft or vandalism.

### Improved Socio-Economic Well-Being and Crime Prevention

Empowerment programs enhance socio-economic well-being, which discourages criminal behavior. Research by Shishima (2018) on the N-Power program in the FCT demonstrated that initiatives focusing on poverty reduction, ICT skills, and financial empowerment led to a decline in youth involvement in crime. The study noted that participants gained on-the-job experience and invested in small businesses, reducing idle time and economic pressures that contribute to criminality (Shishima, 2018). By fostering self-efficacy and financial independence, these programs create a sense of purpose, deterring youths from illegal activities.

#### Positive Behavioral Changes and Community Engagement

Youth empowerment programs promote positive attitudes and civic engagement, which correlate with lower crime rates. Ololo et al. (2019) found that programs encouraging youth activism and community participation in Abuja led to improved social skills and self-esteem, reducing the appeal of criminal behavior. The study's chi-square analysis confirmed a significant relationship between empowerment initiatives and a decreased attitude toward crime involvement (Ololo et al., 2019). When youths are engaged in constructive activities, they are less likely to associate with negative influences that perpetuate crime.

### Challenges Limiting Program Effectiveness

Despite their benefits, youth empowerment programs in the FCT face challenges that hinder their impact on crime reduction. Shishima (2018) highlighted issues such as delayed stipend payments, unpaid allowances, and logistical barriers like long distances to program locations, which discourage participation and limit program reach. These challenges can undermine the potential of empowerment initiatives to fully address crime, as disengaged youths may revert to criminal activities due to frustration or financial strain (Shishima, 2018). The following challenges were noted as constituting obstacles to the effective implementation of the various empowerment programs and hindering program scalability.

- a) Poor funding
- b) Inadequate infrastructure
- c) Corruption in the system
- d) Urban-rural disparities limiting rural youth inclusion.

## Summary, Conclusion, And Recommendations

### Summary

Youth empowerment significantly reduces crime in the FCT by addressing root causes like unemployment and exclusion. Current initiatives show promise but lack reach and resources.

Beyond individual outcomes, youth empowerment programs contribute to societal transformation in the FCT by reducing poverty and fostering community stability. As cited in multiple studies, the World Bank (1994) emphasizes that empowering youths leads to better quality of life and societal development, indirectly lowering crime rates by improving community cohesion (World Bank, 1994, as cited in Ololo et al., 2019).

### Conclusion

Youth empowerment programs in the FCT have a measurable impact on reducing crime by providing skills, economic opportunities, and positive behavioral outlets for youths. Studies like Ololo et al. (2019) and Shishima (2018) demonstrate that these initiatives address key drivers of crime, such as poverty and unemployment, while fostering community engagement. However, challenges like funding delays and logistical barriers must be addressed to maximize their effectiveness. Policymakers should scale up participatory, well-funded programs devoid of corruption to ensure broader impact.

### Recommendations

We recommend that the government of the FCT should;

- Expand vocational training centers across all the area councils, targeting 50,000 youths annually,
- Partner with the private sector to create job opportunities post-training,
- Increase funding for empowerment programs by 30% in the FCT budget, and,
- Launch awareness campaigns via social media and community outreach to reach the rural areas,
- Put in place corruption control mechanisms to reduce incidences of any form of corruption to the barest minimum.

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