Journal of Community & Communication Research
ISSN: 2635-3318
Volume 10; Number 1. June 2025
Accessible at: https://jccr.sccdr.org

ENTREPRENEURIAL ORIENTATION AND LIVELIHOOD ACTIVITIES OF RURAL YOUTH IN AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT
The study examined the entrepreneurial orientation and livelihood activities of rural youth in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, with specific objectives to: assess their livelihood activities, determine their level of entrepreneurial orientation, and analyze the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and livelihood activities. Data were collected from 185 respondents, chosen through a multi-stage sampling procedure. The collated data were analyzed with the aid of descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation. Findings revealed the main livelihood activities as predominantly small scale businesses and crop farming, with an average proportion (48.6%) recording moderate engagement levels. In terms of entrepreneurial orientation, most rural youth showed moderate levels (51.4%), with proactiveness and autonomy ($\bar{x}$=2.7 each) recording above the critical value of 2.5, while risk-taking and competitive aggressiveness ($\bar{x}$=2.4) were below the critical value. Pearson correlation showed a significant and positive relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and livelihood activities ($r = 0.621$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that higher entrepreneurial orientation corresponds with greater livelihood engagement. The study concluded that although rural youth in Akwa Ibom State-were moderately involved in diverse livelihood activities and possessed moderate entrepreneurial orientation, there remains a need to strengthen these areas to improve their livelihood outcomes. Based on the findings, it was recommended that targeted entrepreneurial development programmes that would focus on risk-taking and competitive strategies should be implemented, as this would serve to enhance the engagement of rural youth in sustainable livelihood ventures.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial orientation, Livelihood activities, Rural youth, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Rural youth across developing economies are increasingly challenged by limited employment opportunities, income instability, and inadequate access to productive resources. These limitations have made livelihood diversification an essential strategy for youth survival, especially in rural areas where traditional farming alone can no longer guarantee economic stability. Livelihood activities encompass a broad range of economic engagements, both on-farm and off-farm, that individuals or households undertake to sustain their well-being and secure income (Tabares *et al.*, 2022). As youth constitute a critical segment of the rural population, the promotion of sustainable livelihood activities is essential for reducing rural poverty, mitigating unemployment, and fostering inclusive economic development (Yu *et al*., 2024).

Entrepreneurial orientation, defined by traits such as proactiveness, innovativeness, risk-taking, and autonomy, is recognized as a key driver in fostering youth-led ventures and improving livelihood outcomes (Vodă *et al*., 2020). Entrepreneurial orientation reflects a behavioural tendency and decision-making style that positions individuals to identify and exploit new opportunities in the face of constraints (Makhloufi *et al*., 2021). The relevance of entrepreneurial orientation in enhancing rural livelihood activities has gained traction in recent research, with growing recognition that entrepreneurial youth are better positioned to explore diversified, innovative, and income-yielding livelihood paths (Amaral *et al*., 2024; Pauceanu *et al*., 2019).

While the importance of youth entrepreneurship and livelihood diversification is widely acknowledged, gaps remain in understanding the appropriate factors that influence rural youths' choice of livelihood activities, particularly in areas with high unemployment and underutilized youth potential. The social, economic, and institutional factors shaping entrepreneurial engagement and livelihood activities must be critically examined to develop targeted interventions that empower rural youth for self-reliance and sustainability (Shuker and Sadik, 2024; Tatarko and Schmidt, 2015).

In Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, rural youth face persistent challenges, including land constraints, limited access to finance, weak entrepreneurial support systems, and inadequate skills training (Etuk, 2021; Brown *et al*., 2020). Despite several youth empowerment schemes, there remains a disconnect between entrepreneurial aspirations and the practical realization of sustainable livelihoods. Prior studies in the State, such as Dimelu *et al*. (2020), stressed low levels of youth participation in agricultural enterprises, while Rufai *et al*. (2021) found significant barriers to rural labor market entry among Nigerian youth. Yet, these studies often focus narrowly on employment outcomes without assessing the underlying entrepreneurial orientation that could enhance livelihood decisions.

This study addressed these gaps by exploring the nature of livelihood activities undertaken by rural youth in Akwa Ibom State and assessing their entrepreneurial orientation. In doing so, the study offered a comprehensive framework for understanding how entrepreneurial attributes can be leveraged to transform the livelihood realities of rural youth in Nigeria.

The broad objective of this study was to examine the entrepreneurial orientation and livelihood activities of rural youth in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. On a specific basis, the study assessed the livelihood activities of rural youth, ascertained their level of entrepreneurial orientation, and analyzed the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and livelihood activities among rural youth in the study area.

METHODOLOGY

This research was carried out in Akwa Ibom State, situated in Nigeria's South-South geopolitical zone. The state is largely agricultural, with many residents involved in farming, fishing, small-scale trading, and various informal economic ventures. A descriptive survey design was employed, as it was suitable for assessing the entrepreneurial orientation and livelihood activities of rural youth. A multi-stage sampling approach guided the selection of participants. First, six out of the state's thirty-one (31) Local Government Areas (LGAs) were purposively chosen based on their predominantly rural nature and significant youth involvement in livelihood pursuits. In the next stage, three rural communities were randomly selected from each of the six LGAs, resulting in a total of eighteen (18) communities. Finally, a proportional sampling technique was used within each community to select a total of 185 rural youth, who made up the study's sample.

Data were gathered using a structured questionnaire that was divided into sections to obtain information on socio-economic characteristics, livelihood activities, entrepreneurial orientation, and factors influencing the choice of livelihood activities.

Descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentages, and means were used to summarize data on livelihood activities and entrepreneurial orientation. Livelihood activities were measured using a four-point Likert-type scale ranging from "Never" (1) to "Always" (4) and categorized based on the cumulative scale score into low, moderate, and high engagement levels. Similarly, entrepreneurial orientation was measured across five dimensions, autonomy, innovativeness, proactiveness, risk-taking, and competitive aggressiveness, using a four-point Likert-type scale. Responses were categorized to reflect low, moderate, and high levels of entrepreneurial orientation.

Pearson product-moment correlation was employed to analyse the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and livelihood activities among rural youth. This statistical technique was deemed appropriate to determine the strength and direction of the linear relationship between the composite scores of entrepreneurial orientation and livelihood engagement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-Economic Characteristics of Rural Youth

The general socio-economic profile of rural youth in the study area, as adapted from Archibong (2024), portrays a predominantly young, male, moderately educated, and economically constrained demographic who are mainly involved in unregistered, survivalist, but market-oriented business enterprises. These findings portrayed significant implications for entrepreneurial orientation and livelihood strategies, and they form the contextual foundation for understanding entrepreneurial behavior. This is in alignment with Kyndt and Baert (2015), who emphasized the predictive value of socio-economic factors in entrepreneurial competence development.

Livelihood Activities of Rural Youth in Akwa Ibom State

Results on Table 1 revealed that rural youth in the study area were found to engage in a variety of livelihood activities, with small business activities recording the highest average mean of ($\bar{x}$) 2.87, followed by crop farming ($\bar{x}$ =2.78), livestock rearing ($\bar{x}$ = 2.72), remittances and migration ($\bar{x}$ =2.63), and fishing and aquaculture ($\bar{x}$ = 2.50). These findings indicate a general preference for off-farm livelihood strategies, particularly those involving commerce and small-scale enterprises, over more traditional agriculture-based engagements like fishing and aquaculture. This observation is consistent with Ibrahim *et al.* (2023), who reported that rural youth are gradually shifting away from traditional farming to more diversified income-generating activities, largely due to the perceived higher profitability and lower labour intensity of non-agricultural sectors.

The relatively high participation in small business ventures such as managing stalls, offering services like tailoring, phone repairs, or other skilled trades supports Thomas *et al.,* (2024) assertion that rural innovations and non-farm enterprises play a growing role in strengthening socio-economic resilience in Akwa Ibom State. Dimelu *et al*. (2020) similarly observed that while agriculture remains important, the steady income and autonomy associated with small businesses significantly motivate rural youth toward such pursuits. This is true in the present study, where many respondents reported frequent engagement in market-based activities.
In terms of crop farming, the average mean of 2.78 suggests a moderately high level of involvement. Youth participate in both cash crop and vegetable cultivation, blending subsistence with market-oriented production. It was, however, revealed that exclusive subsistence farming had lower participation, pointing to a stronger preference for commercial farming practices.

Although remittances and migration recorded a moderate average mean of 2.63, these activities remained noteworthy strategies among youth. Many respondents reported receiving remittances or temporarily migrating for seasonal jobs to supplement income. This supports the findings of Shuker and Sadik (2024), who noted that temporary migration and family support are coping mechanisms used when local employment opportunities are insufficient. Waheed (2021) similarly emphasized that migration is often a necessity rather than a choice, pointing to systemic employment gaps in rural areas.

Fishing and aquaculture, with the lowest average mean of 2.50, indicated minimal engagement. A significant number of respondents reported that they rarely or never participated in these activities. This may stem from factors like inadequate access to equipment, environmental degradation, or overfishing. Indications are that enabling structures for engagement in these activities may be lacking or ineffective in the study area.

Table 1: Distribution of Livelihood Activities among Rural Youth in Akwa-Ibom State (n=185)

Livelihood Activity	Never F(%)	Rarely F(%)	Often F(%)	Always F(%)	Mean
Crop Farming					
I engage in growing cash crops for income	20 (10.8)	35 (18.9)	75 (40.5)	55 (29.7)	2.89
I engage in cultivating vegetables for sale or consumption.	25 (13.5)	40 (21.6)	70 (37.8)	50 (27.0)	2.78
I farm exclusively to produce food for my family, without selling the crops in the market.	30 (16.2)	45 (24.3)	65 (35.1)	45 (24.3)	2.68
Average Mean					**2.78**
Livestock Rearing					
I engage in raising chickens for eggs or meat.	15 (8.1)	30 (16.2)	80 (43.2)	60 (32.4)	3.00
I engage in rearing goats or sheep for income or family needs.	25 (13.5)	35 (18.9)	75 (40.5)	50 (27.0)	2.81
I engage in keeping pigs for personal or commercial purposes.	45 (24.3)	70 (37.8)	30 (16.2)	40 (21.6)	2.35
Average Mean					**2.72**
Fishing and Aquaculture					
I engage in fishing in rivers, streams, or other water bodies to earn a living or support my household.	35 (18.9)	45 (24.3)	65 (35.1)	40 (21.6)	2.60
I raise fish in ponds or tanks as a business or livelihood activity.	40 (21.6)	50 (27.0)	60 (32.4)	35 (18.9)	2.49
I engage in catching crabs, shrimps, or other aquatic animals for food or as a source of income.	45 (24.3)	55 (29.7)	50 (27.0)	35 (18.9)	2.41
Average Mean					**2.50**
Small Business Activities					
I engage in selling goods or products in local markets or community areas.	10 (5.4)	25 (13.5)	80 (43.2)	70 (37.8)	3.14
I am involved in managing or running a small shop, kiosk, or roadside stall.	15 (8.1)	30 (16.2)	75 (40.5)	65 (35.1)	3.03
I provide personal or professional services (e.g., hairdressing, tailoring, carpentry, phone repairs, etc.).	41 (22.2)	68 (36.8)	28 (15.1)	88 (47.6)	2.45
Average Mean					**2.87**
Remittances and Migration					
I regularly receive financial support (remittances) from family members or relatives living elsewhere.	25 (13.5)	40 (21.6)	75 (40.5)	45 (24.3)	2.76
I temporarily migrate to other locations to seek or engage in work opportunities.	30 (16.2)	50 (27.0)	65 (35.1)	40 (21.6)	2.62
I participate in seasonal work activities in locations outside my usual residence.	35 (18.9)	55 (29.7)	60 (32.4)	35 (18.9)	2.51
Average Mean					**2.63**

Critical value=2.5

Source: Field data (2024).

Table 2 further categorizes the overall level of livelihood engagement among respondents: About 29.7% had

high engagement, 48.6% had moderate engagement, and 21.6% had low engagement. These figures support the view that most rural youth are reasonably active in livelihood pursuits, though with differing levels of intensity. Madende *et al*. (2023) noted that rural youth are not disengaged from agricultural or rural economies per se, but their participation is often shaped by diverse interests, competencies, and access to resources. This is further corroborated by Edet and Akpan (2024), who reported that social capital and informal networks play a key role in enabling economic participation among rural youth in the state.

In essence, while traditional agricultural practices remain relevant, rural youth in Akwa Ibom State are increasingly exploring diversified livelihood activities, especially in entrepreneurial and non-farm activities. This aligns with Yu *et al.'s* (2024) emphasis on the need to integrate education, entrepreneurship, and rural development policies in order to improve youth employment outcomes. The findings are consistent with broader literature indicating that income potential, independence, and mobility significantly influence youth livelihood choices in rural areas.

Table 2: Categorization of Livelihood Activities among Rural Youth in Akwa Ibom State

Level of Livelihood Activities	Score Range	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Low Engagement	0 – 20	40	21.6
Moderate Engagement	21 – 40	90	48.6
High Engagement	41 – 60	55	29.7
Total		**185**	**100**

Source: Field data (2024).

Level of Entrepreneurial Orientation among Rural Youth

The level of entrepreneurial orientation among rural youth in Akwa Ibom State, as measured by five dimensions of autonomy, innovativeness, proactiveness, risk-taking, and competitive aggressiveness, indicated a generally moderate disposition as shown in Table 3. The average mean scores for autonomy (2.7), innovativeness (2.6), and proactiveness (2.7) surpassed the critical value of 2.5. This suggested a relatively positive orientation in these domains. These findings imply that rural youth have some degree of independence in business decisions, display moderate tendencies toward innovation, and are somewhat proactive in identifying and acting upon new opportunities.

However, the average mean scores for risk-taking (2.4) and competitive aggressiveness (2.4) fell below the benchmark, indicating a reluctance to engage in high-risk ventures or aggressive competition strategies.
Table 4 further categorized the entrepreneurial orientation levels among the respondents, with a majority (51.4%) falling into the moderate category, 27.0% in the low category, and only 21.6% exhibiting high entrepreneurial orientation. This distribution supports the observation that while many rural youth exhibit some entrepreneurial tendencies, fewer are fully engaged in behaviors associated with high entrepreneurial drive.

This finding aligns with the results of the study by Ogunkoya (2019), who found that, with regard to SMEs in Nigeria that while innovation and autonomy were relatively well expressed, risk-taking and aggressive competition remained subdued, pointing to a cautious entrepreneurial environment. These reports are indicative of the fact that rural youth in Akwa Ibom State were not significantly different in entrepreneurial disposition from other parts of the country.

Palmer *et al*. (2017) emphasized the importance of the interplay between entrepreneurial orientation and

individual traits in predicting firm performance. Their findings support the notion that entrepreneurial traits like autonomy and proactiveness are vital, as is echoed in the current study's result, where these traits scored above the threshold. However, their study also highlighted the critical role of risk-taking and competitive aggressiveness in enhancing performance, which presents a divergence from the present findings. The relatively low levels of these traits in Akwa Ibom State may limit the growth potential of youth-led ventures unless deliberately nurtured through capacity-building initiatives.

The finding that a majority of rural youth fall within the moderate category also finds resonance with the work of Zouitini *et al*. (2024), who emphasized that entrepreneurial orientation, while critical, must be supported by enabling financial systems and inclusion mechanisms to result in sustained entrepreneurship. This further suggests that environmental and institutional factors may be partially responsible for the subdued entrepreneurial expression observed among youth in Akwa Ibom. In essence, the above-stated findings indicate a cautiously entrepreneurial mindset among rural youth in the study area, particularly in non-risk-intensive traits. This pattern is largely consistent with existing literature, affirming moderate entrepreneurial orientation as a common trend among youth in similar socio-economic situations. However, the relatively low orientation in risk-taking and competitive aggressiveness, though consistent with many findings, also stresses a significant developmental need that must be addressed through tailored policy, education, and mentorship programs to foster a more robust entrepreneurial culture.

Table 3: Distribution of Responses on Entrepreneurial Orientation among Rural Youth in Akwa Ibom State (n=185)

Statements	Strongly Disagree F(%)	Disagree F(%)	Agree F(%)	Strongly Agree F(%)	Mean
Autonomy					
My team makes decisions without needing approval.	30 (16.2)	50 (27.0)	65 (35.1)	40 (21.6)	2.6
We are allowed to choose our own business opportunities.	25 (13.5)	45 (24.3)	70 (37.8)	45 (24.3)	2.7
My ideas are valued in the business.	20 (10.8)	40 (21.6)	75 (40.5)	50 (27.0)	2.8
Average Mean (Autonomy)					**2.7**
Innovativeness					
We often introduce new products or services.	22 (11.9)	55 (29.7)	70 (37.8)	38 (20.5)	2.7
My firm is always looking for better ways to do things.	50 (27.0)	40 (21.6)	65 (35.1)	35 (18.9)	2.5
We regularly improve our products or services.	35 (18.9)	50 (27.0)	55 (29.7)	45 (24.3)	2.6
Average Mean (Innovativeness)					**2.6**
Proactiveness					
My firm leads by taking action before others.	25 (13.5)	40 (21.6)	70 (37.8)	50 (27.0)	2.8
We are usually the first to offer new products.	44 (23.8)	65 (35.1)	33 (17.3)	43 (23.4)	2.4
My firm is good at spotting new opportunities.	18 (9.7)	35 (18.9)	85 (45.9)	47 (25.4)	2.9
Average Mean (Proactiveness)					**2.7**
Risk-Taking					
My firm takes risks to achieve big rewards.	40 (21.6)	60 (32.4)	50 (27.0)	35 (18.9)	2.4
We invest heavily to grow our business.	35 (18.9)	55 (29.7)	61 (33.0)	34 (18.4)	2.5
We are encouraged to try new ideas, even if risky.	50 (27.0)	55 (29.7)	45 (24.3)	35 (18.9)	2.3
Average Mean (Risk-Taking)					**2.4**
Competitive Aggressiveness					
My firm works hard to beat our competitors.	45 (24.3)	70 (37.8)	40 (21.6)	30 (16.2)	2.3
We use bold activities to stay ahead of competitors.	50 (27.0)	65 (35.1)	45 (24.3)	25 (13.5)	2.2
Sometimes, my firm adjusts prices to compete better.	55 (29.7)	60 (32.4)	40 (21.6)	30 (16.2)	2.6
Average Mean (Competitive Aggressiveness)					**2.4**

Critical value=2.5

Source: Field data (2024).

Table 4: Categorization of Entrepreneurial Orientation among Rural Youth in Akwa Ibom State

Level of Entrepreneurial Orientation	Score Range	Frequency	%
Low	0 – 20	50	27.0
Moderate	21 – 40	95	51.4
High	41 – 60	40	21.6
Total		**185**	**100**

Source: Field data (2024).

Relationship between Entrepreneurial Orientation and Livelihood Activities

Results of the correlation analysis presented in Table 6 revealed a statistically significant and positive relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and livelihood strategies among rural youth in Akwa Ibom State, with a correlation coefficient (r) of 0.65 and a p-value of 0.002. This indicates that as entrepreneurial orientation increases, the engagement of rural youth in diverse livelihood activities also increases, suggesting that youth with higher entrepreneurial orientation are more proactive, innovative, and risk-taking in pursuing livelihood opportunities.

This finding is strongly supported by the reports of Etuk *et al*. (2020) and Soininen *et al*. (2013), who argued that entrepreneurial orientation, as it relates to rural youth, can stimulate involvement in diverse livelihood activities that are innovative and opportunity driven. Similarly, Amaral *et al*. (2024) found that exposure to entrepreneurship education enhances individual entrepreneurial orientation, which in turn promotes participation in income-generating ventures, a relationship that points to the significant correlation found in this study.

Chang *et al*. (2024) and Obot *et al*. (2024) also provided evidence that entrepreneurial orientation plays a critical role in determining entrepreneurial intention, even in challenging environments. This supports the idea that entrepreneurial orientation among rural youth in Akwa Ibom State enables them to initiate or engage more confidently in productive livelihood activities despite socio-economic constraints.

The findings are also consistent with the study by Ataei *et al*. (2020), who emphasized that entrepreneurial competencies, as manifestations of entrepreneurial orientation, significantly impact rural youth's intentions to start and sustain small enterprises. This implies that the stronger the orientation, the more likely it is for rural youth to engage in viable livelihood activities.

The findings may, however, be found to be inconsistent in situations where external constraints override individual orientation. For instance, Ifeanyi-Obi and Matthews-Njoku (2014) reported that socio-economic factors such as land access and capital had a more dominant influence on livelihood choices among rural dwellers in Southeast Nigeria. This suggests that while entrepreneurial orientation is vital, its influence might be moderated by circumstantial factors not fully captured in correlation analysis.

Nonetheless, the general consistency between the findings of this study and others such as those by Zhang and Xing (2023), who demonstrated a strong link between entrepreneurial orientation and organizational performance and Ogunkoya (2019), who emphasized market innovativeness as a component of entrepreneurial orientation, reinforces the reliability and relevance of the present findings. Thus, entrepreneurial orientation can be seen as both a driver and an enabler of livelihood diversification and innovation among rural youth in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 5: Test of the relationship between the entrepreneurial orientation of rural youth in Akwa Ibom State and their livelihood strategies

Variables	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Prob. Value (p)	Remark
Entrepreneurial Orientation of Rural Youth in Akwa Ibom State and Livelihood Strategies	0.65	0.002**	Significant

*** Significant at 0.05 level*

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study revealed that rural youth in Akwa Ibom State are actively engaged in various livelihood activities, with small business ventures and livestock rearing being the most prominent. Despite moderate to high participation in these activities, a majority of the youth demonstrated only a moderate level of entrepreneurial orientation, particularly in areas such as autonomy, innovativeness, and proactiveness. However, dimensions like risk-taking and competitive aggressiveness were below the critical mean, indicating a limited inclination towards bold or strategic market behaviours. The correlation analysis confirmed a significant positive relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and livelihood activities, emphasizing the role of entrepreneurial orientation in shaping income-generating efforts. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. There is a need for targeted development programmes that emphasize practical training in risk-taking, recognition of opportunity, and competitiveness. Such initiatives should be integrated into agricultural and youth empowerment policies to enhance proactive and innovative behaviors among rural youth.

2. Rural youth should be encouraged and supported to diversify beyond traditional farming into high value-added farm and non-farm enterprises. This can be achieved through technical training, access to innovation hubs, and market linkage facilitation, enabling them to maximize income potential and reduce dependency on a single livelihood source.

3. Rural youth should be connected with successful entrepreneurs and mentors within and outside the agricultural sector, as to significantly boost their confidence and business expertise. Peer-learning groups and cooperative clusters can facilitate experience sharing, collaborative learning, and collective risk mitigation.

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