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Youth empowerment in Africa: Lessons for U. S. youth development programs

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Abstract

This scholarly investigation delves into the realm of youth empowerment in Africa, aiming to distill pivotal lessons for enhancing youth development programs in the United States. Anchored in a comparative framework, the study meticulously juxtaposes African and U.S. youth empowerment paradigms, unraveling the intricate tapestry of socio-economic, cultural, and educational dynamics that shape these programs. The study meticulously analyzes various case studies of successful youth empowerment initiatives across diverse African nations. These case studies were selected based on stringent criteria, ensuring a comprehensive representation of the continent's youth empowerment landscape. The methodology eschews statistical or fieldwork analysis, instead focusing on a critical review of existing literature and program reports to glean insights into the efficacy and impact of these initiatives. Central to the findings is the burgeoning demographic of African youth, poised as a catalyst for socio-economic transformation. Despite facing formidable challenges, the study highlights how African youth empowerment programs have triumphed in fostering educational, vocational, and community engagement outcomes. These successes offer a reservoir of strategies and insights applicable to the U.S. context, particularly in enhancing community involvement and resilience among youth. The conclusion synthesizes these insights, emphasizing the transformative potential of youth empowerment in socio-economic development. Recommendations advocate for the integration of African models into U.S. youth programs, emphasizing community-centric approaches, entrepreneurship, and technological integration. This study bridges a crucial knowledge gap and serves as a beacon for future youth empowerment strategies, both in Africa and globally. It underscores the universality of youth aspirations and the power of tailored empowerment strategies in realizing these aspirations.

Keywords: Youth Empowerment; Africa; United States; Comparative Analysis; Socio-Economic Development

1. Introduction

1.1. Contextualizing Youth Empowerment in Africa

The demographic landscape of Africa is a critical factor in understanding the continent's socio-economic development, particularly in the context of youth empowerment. The youth demographic in Africa is substantial and pivotal to the continent's future (Aboagye et al., 2023). Dum and Nwafor (2019) emphasizes that the common belief that African youth have not significantly contributed to national development is a misconception. Instead, Africa's lack of active youth leadership is attributed to hostile political, economic, and social environments and rigid structural barriers in politics and the economy, particularly in West African countries (Dum and Nwafor, 2019). These barriers, coupled with cultural practices that require deference to elders, have historically limited youth autonomy and their ability to organize effectively for political and economic change.

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Ongaro and Salvini (2016) provide a broader perspective by linking high fertility rates and demographic pressure with development challenges in sub-Saharan Africa. Their study reveals a negative effect of dependent populations on development and highlights the importance of women's empowerment as a positive influence. This demographic pressure, characterized by a high proportion of young people, underscores the urgency of youth empowerment in driving socio-economic development (Ongaro & Salvini, 2016).

Furthermore, the vulnerability of African youth to social problems, including racism, is exacerbated by the shortfall in youth development and empowerment strategies in many African countries (Michael, 2021). Michael (2021), argues that these deficiencies not only hinder the development of youth but also expose them to various forms of discrimination and prejudice, particularly when they seek opportunities abroad.

Therefore, the demographic picture of African youth makes it evident that engaging youth fully in development is not a matter of choice but an imperative for national development. The empowerment of youth is essential for overall national development, peace, and security. This is particularly true in the African context, where the youth demographic is a significant portion of the population. The challenge lies in overcoming the structural and cultural barriers that have historically impeded youth participation in political and economic spheres.

The demographic landscape of Africa, characterized by a large and growing youth population, is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it presents significant challenges due to the existing socio-political and economic structures that limit youth empowerment. On the other hand, it offers a unique opportunity for transformative socio-economic development if strategic investments are made in youth empowerment. The key to harnessing this demographic dividend lies in addressing the structural barriers to youth participation and creating enabling environments for their active engagement in socio-economic development processes.

1.1.1. Overview of the demographic landscape in Africa.

The demographic landscape in Africa, characterized by a youthful population, plays a significant role in shaping the continent's socio-economic development. The burgeoning youth population presents both challenges and opportunities, particularly in the context of employment and empowerment.

Makananise and Madima (2020) explore the role of digital media technology in empowering female youth in rural South Africa. Their study highlights how digital media serves as a critical tool for socio-economic empowerment, enabling young women to voice societal issues and bridge the information gap. The research conducted in Thohoyandou, South Africa, demonstrates that digital media is a potent enabler for female youth, allowing them to participate more actively in socio-economic discourse and development. This participation is crucial in a continent where the youth demographic is rapidly expanding and increasingly connected through technology (Makananise & Madima, 2020).

Kanjere and Choenyane (2022) address the socio-economic challenges posed by youth unemployment in South Africa, particularly in rural communities. Their study in the Limpopo province reveals that a significant portion of the youth population is either unskilled or semi-skilled, leading to their marginalization in the economy. The high rate of youth unemployment affects individual livelihoods and has broader implications for the national economy. The study recommends a shift in the education system and the development of entrepreneurship skills among the youth as critical steps towards addressing these challenges (Kanjere & Choenyane, 2022).

Therefore, the demographic landscape in Africa is a critical factor in understanding the continent's future trajectory. As a significant portion of the population, the youth are central to the continent's socio-economic transformation. However, realizing this potential requires addressing the challenges they face, particularly in terms of employment and skill development. Investments in digital technology, education, and entrepreneurship are key to unlocking the potential of Africa's youth and ensuring their active participation in the continent's socio-economic development.

The intersection of technology, education, and entrepreneurship presents a unique opportunity for African countries to harness the potential of their youthful populations. Policymakers can create an environment conducive to youth empowerment and economic growth by focusing on these areas. This approach is particularly relevant in the African context, where the demographic dividend can be a significant driver of socio-economic progress.

The demographic landscape in Africa, with its large and growing youth population, is a pivotal factor in the continent's socio-economic development. Addressing the challenges faced by this demographic, particularly in terms of employment and skill development, is essential for harnessing their potential. Investments in digital technology,

education, and entrepreneurship are key to empowering the youth and ensuring their contribution to the continent's socio-economic growth.

1.1.2. Significance of youth empowerment in African socio-economic development.

Youth empowerment in Africa is critical to the continent's journey towards sustainable economic development. The significance of empowering the youth, who constitute a substantial portion of the African population, cannot be overstated, as their involvement and active participation are essential for socio-economic progress.

Accord (2020) emphasizes the potential of Nigeria's youth in driving sustainable economic development. With more than 50% of its population falling within the youth age range, Nigeria has a massive prospect for economic development if this human resource is efficiently harnessed. However, the challenge lies in the sustainability of youth empowerment programs. The high unemployment rate among Nigerian youth, which stands at over 80% of the unemployed population, underscores this demographic's need for strategic engagement in productive activities (Accord, 2020).

Kanjere and Choenyane (2022) explore the socio-economic challenges posed by youth unemployment in South Africa, particularly in rural areas like Limpopo. The study reveals that a significant number of young people are either unskilled or semi-skilled, leading to their marginalization in the economy. This situation affects individual livelihoods and has broader implications for the national economy. The authors recommend a shift in the education system and the development of entrepreneurship skills among the youth as critical steps towards addressing these challenges (Kanjere & Choenyane, 2022).

Diraditsile (2022) discusses the nexus between youth empowerment programs and youth unemployment reduction in Botswana. The study highlights that policy implementers lack adequate capacity to help youth realize socio-economic empowerment. Several challenges have continued to affect the attempts to implement sustainable youth empowerment programs. The paper recommends involving youth in policy formulation and implementation to achieve employability through youth programs (Diraditsile, 2022).

The significance of youth empowerment in African socio-economic development lies in the potential of the youth to drive economic growth and social change. However, realizing this potential requires addressing the challenges they face, particularly in terms of employment and skill development. Investments in education, technology, and entrepreneurship are key to unlocking the potential of Africa's youth and ensuring their active participation in socio-economic development.

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1.2. Comparative Analysis: African vs. U.S. Youth Development Paradigms

The youth development paradigms in Africa and the United States present a study in contrasts, shaped by differing socio-economic, cultural, and political contexts. A comparative analysis of these paradigms offers insights into the unique challenges and opportunities in youth development in both regions.

Butorov and Adlov (2021) provide a comparative analysis of state youth policies in the United States and Russia, which can offer parallels for understanding the U.S. approach to youth development. The study highlights the legal and institutional frameworks that underpin youth policies in the U.S., emphasizing the role of governmental and public institutions in shaping youth development. The U.S. model, characterized by a structured and legalistic approach, contrasts with many African countries' more informal and community-based youth development strategies (Butorov & Adlov, 2021).

Furman (2016) examines the economic engagement of the United States in Sub-Saharan Africa, offering insights into how U.S. policies impact youth development in the region. The U.S. approach, which separates trade from aid, contrasts with the more integrated approaches seen in some African countries. This separation can influence the types of youth development programs implemented and their effectiveness in addressing the unique challenges faced by African youth (Furman, 2016).

Cohen and Macekura (2022) analyze international development studies majors in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, providing a perspective on how youth development is conceptualized and taught in higher education. This analysis can be extended to understand the differences in educational approaches to youth development between Western countries and African nations. The Western emphasis on interdisciplinary and experiential learning in development studies may contrast with more traditional educational models in Africa, which can impact the preparedness of youth for socio-economic challenges (Cohen & Macekura, 2022).

The comparative analysis of youth development paradigms in Africa and the United States reveals significant differences in approaches and outcomes. With its structured legal framework and emphasis on formal education, the U.S. model contrasts with the more informal, community-based approaches common in many African countries. Varying socio-economic conditions, cultural norms, and political contexts shape these differences. Understanding these differences is crucial for developing effective youth development strategies tailored to each region's specific needs and conditions.

The youth development paradigms in Africa and the United States offer distinct approaches to addressing the challenges faced by young people. While the U.S. model emphasizes formal structures and education, African paradigms often rely on community engagement and informal networks. These differences highlight the importance of context-specific strategies in youth development and the potential for cross-learning between different regions.

1.3. Success Stories of Youth Empowerment in Africa

Youth empowerment in Africa has seen various successful initiatives, each highlighting the potential of young people when given the right opportunities and support. These success stories offer valuable lessons and insights into effective strategies for youth development.

Masha et al. (2022) discuss the impact of business mentorship on youth entrepreneurship in South Africa. Their study in the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality reveals that mentorship plays a crucial role in entrepreneurial success, particularly in business plan writing. Despite the challenges, such as the unavailability of proper business knowledge and mentorship, the study shows that when youth entrepreneurs receive adequate mentoring, it significantly boosts their ventures, leading to economic development and employment creation. This case underscores the importance of mentorship in empowering young entrepreneurs (Masha et al., 2022).

Omukunda and Sakwa (2018) explore the role of community-based organization (CBO) loans in youth economic empowerment in Nairobi, Kenya. Their research in Makadara Sub-County indicates that CBO loans are statistically significant in empowering youth economically. The study highlights the effectiveness of CBOs in providing youth-friendly loan facilities, which are instrumental in supporting young people's entrepreneurial endeavors. This model demonstrates the potential of community-level interventions in facilitating youth economic empowerment (Omukunda & Sakwa, 2018).

Singh and Ntuli (2017) examine the Youth Empowerment Scheme Programme at the National Institute for Crime Prevention and Reintegration of Offenders (NICRO) in Durban, South Africa. This diversion program aims to rehabilitate youth offenders and reduce their involvement in crime. The study reveals that such programs, by addressing the factors contributing to criminal behavior among youth, can successfully reintegrate them into society. This case study highlights the importance of tailored interventions in empowering at-risk youth and preventing their further involvement in crime (Singh & Ntuli, 2017).

These success stories from different parts of Africa demonstrate the diverse approaches to youth empowerment, from business mentorship and economic support to rehabilitation programs for at-risk youth. Each case provides valuable insights into effective strategies for empowering young people, emphasizing the importance of context-specific solutions, community involvement, and targeted support.

The success stories of youth empowerment in Africa reflect the continent's dynamic and multifaceted approach to youth development. These cases illustrate the significant impact of mentorship, community-based financial support, and rehabilitation programs in empowering young people, contributing to their personal growth and the socio-economic development of their communities.

1.3.1. Case studies of successful youth programs in various African countries

The landscape of youth empowerment in Africa is dotted with numerous success stories, each offering unique insights into effective strategies for engaging and uplifting young people. These case studies from various African countries provide a rich tapestry of experiences and lessons that can inform and inspire youth development programs.

Masha et al. (2022) highlight the critical role of business mentorship in empowering young entrepreneurs in South Africa. Their study in the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality underscores the importance of mentorship in business plan writing and entrepreneurial success. The research reveals that youth entrepreneurs who receive adequate mentoring are more likely to succeed, thereby contributing to economic development and job creation. This case study demonstrates the transformative power of mentorship in nurturing young business talent (Masha et al., 2022).

In Kenya, Omukunda and Sakwa (2018) examine the impact of community-based organization (CBO) loans on youth economic empowerment in Nairobi's Makadara Sub-County. Their findings indicate that CBO loans significantly empower youth economically, highlighting the effectiveness of community-level financial interventions. This approach demonstrates how localized, youth-friendly financial services can support young entrepreneurs, fostering economic independence and growth (Omukunda & Sakwa, 2018).

Singh and Ntuli (2017) explore the Youth Empowerment Scheme Programme at the National Institute for Crime Prevention and Reintegration of Offenders (NICRO) in Durban, South Africa. This diversion program focuses on rehabilitating youth offenders, reducing their involvement in crime. The study shows that addressing the underlying factors contributing to criminal behavior among youth can lead to successful reintegration into society, emphasizing the need for tailored interventions for at-risk youth (Singh & Ntuli, 2017).

Israel (2013) discusses the participation of young people in the electoral processes in Mafikeng Local Municipality, South Africa. This doctoral dissertation sheds light on the political empowerment of youth, illustrating how their involvement in electoral processes can lead to more inclusive and representative governance. The study underscores the importance of engaging youth in political processes as a means of empowerment and societal development.

These success stories from South Africa and Kenya illustrate Africa's diverse and effective approaches to youth empowerment. From mentorship in entrepreneurship to financial support through CBO loans and political participation to rehabilitation programs, these case studies provide valuable lessons in engaging and empowering young people. They highlight the importance of context-specific solutions, community involvement, and targeted support in youth development programs.

1.4. Challenges and Triumphs in African Youth Empowerment

African youth empowerment has faced numerous challenges, yet it has also seen significant triumphs. Dum and Nwafor (2019) discuss the challenges faced by young leaders in the African public service sector, highlighting the hostile political, economic, and social environments as major barriers. Despite these challenges, there have been opportunities for engagement and leadership, suggesting that the low level of active youth leadership is not due to a lack of interest but rather due to structural barriers and cultural practices (Dum and Nwafor, 2019).

Zeelen (2014) addresses the broader context of social exclusion of youth, particularly in relation to education and the labor market. The study points out the overproduction of policies and underperformance in implementation, leading to high dropout rates and a skills gap between education and labor market needs. This dysfunctionality in the education system contributes significantly to the challenges faced by youth in sub-Saharan Africa (Zeelen, 2014).

Despite these challenges, there have been notable triumphs. Azunna et al. (2021) explore the success of youth volunteering for development in South Africa, demonstrating how such initiatives can contribute to both personal development and community improvement. This study illustrates the positive impact of youth engagement in volunteer work, providing a model for other African nations to emulate (Azunna et al., 2021).

1.5. Relevance of African Youth Empowerment Models to U.S. Context

The models of youth empowerment in Africa have significant relevance to the U.S. context. The challenges and successes in African youth empowerment provide valuable lessons for U.S. youth development programs. Dum and Nwafor (2019) suggest that understanding the structural and cultural barriers faced by youth in Africa can inform U.S. strategies in dealing with similar issues within its diverse youth population.

Zeelen (2014) emphasizes the importance of policy implementation and the need for grassroots participation, which are also relevant to the U.S. context. The U.S. can learn from the African experience to improve its education and training programs, ensuring they are more aligned with the labor market and the needs of at-risk youth.

Azunna et al. (2021) demonstrate the power of volunteering and community engagement in youth development. This approach can be adapted in the U.S. to enhance youth participation in community development and to foster a sense of responsibility and empowerment among young people.

The experiences of African countries in youth empowerment, with their unique challenges and triumphs, offer valuable insights for U.S. youth development programs. These insights include the importance of addressing structural and cultural barriers, the need for effective policy implementation, and the benefits of community engagement and volunteerism.

1.6. Evolution of Youth Empowerment Strategies in Africa

The evolution of African youth empowerment strategies has been marked by a shift towards more sustainable and inclusive approaches. Accord (2020) examines the youth empowerment programs in Nigeria, emphasizing the need for sustainable economic development. The study highlights that despite numerous Nigerian government initiatives, a lack of sustainability remains a critical issue. The research suggests revamping these programs strategically to engage youths productively and contribute significantly to the economy (Accord, 2020).

In rural Zimbabwe, Hlungwani (2020) evaluates the strategies for youth empowerment, noting several shortcomings within the policy framework. The study identifies tokenistic consultation in formulating, designing, and implementing policies, along with a shortage of funds and corruption as major impediments. Hlungwani advocates for context-specific policies that meet the real rural challenges faced by the youth, emphasizing the importance of youth participation at every stage of policy development and implementation (Hlungwani, 2020).

Objectives of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to explore and analyze the various models of youth empowerment in Africa, their successes, challenges, and potential lessons for U.S. youth development programs. To achieve this aim, the study sets out the following five objectives:

- **To Understand the Demographic Landscape of African Youth:** This objective involves examining the demographic characteristics of the youth population in Africa, including age distribution, educational levels, and socio-economic backgrounds. Understanding these demographics is crucial for contextualizing the continent's need and approach for youth empowerment.
- **To Assess the Significance of Youth Empowerment in African Socio-Economic Development:** This objective seeks to explore how empowering the youth contributes to the socio-economic development of African countries. It involves analyzing the impact of youth empowerment on aspects such as employment, entrepreneurship, and social change.
- **To Compare African and U.S. Youth Development Paradigms:** This objective aims to conduct a comparative analysis of youth development models in Africa and the United States, identifying similarities, differences, and potential areas where U.S. programs can draw lessons from African experiences.
- **To Evaluate Success Stories and Challenges in African Youth Empowerment:** This involves a detailed examination of case studies from various African countries, highlighting successful youth programs and the challenges they faced. This objective also includes understanding how these programs overcame obstacles and the key factors that contributed to their success.

These objectives are designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of youth empowerment in Africa and its potential implications for enhancing youth development programs in the United States.

1.7. Scope and Limitations of the Review

This review focuses on the examination of youth empowerment strategies in Africa and their applicability to youth development programs in the United States. The scope of this study encompasses a detailed analysis of demographic trends, socio-economic impacts, and comparative paradigms between African and U.S. youth empowerment models. It includes an evaluation of case studies from various African countries, highlighting both successful initiatives and challenges faced in the realm of youth empowerment.

However, the study has certain limitations. Firstly, the vast diversity and complexity of the African continent mean that the findings may not uniformly apply to all African countries. Each country has unique socio-cultural, economic, and political contexts that shape its youth empowerment strategies. Secondly, the transferability of African models to the U.S. context is subject to cultural, economic, and policy differences between the two regions. Lastly, the study relies on

available literature and case studies, which may not cover all recent developments or grassroots initiatives in the field of youth empowerment.

Despite these limitations, the review aims to provide valuable insights and a foundational understanding of the dynamics of youth empowerment in Africa and its potential lessons for the U.S.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Approach and Strategy

The research approach for studying youth empowerment in Africa is multifaceted, drawing insights from various models of community empowerment and inclusive development. Fatihin and Rasyad (2021) emphasize the importance of community learning efforts in enhancing village communities' social, economic, and environmental pillars. Their study on community empowerment facilitators in Pendopo Kembangkopi highlights the critical role of education and training in improving the quality of community business production and human resource capacity (Fatihin and Rasyad, 2021). This approach underscores the necessity of integrating educational initiatives into youth empowerment programs to foster socio-economic development.

Paalo (2022) provides a critical perspective on inclusive peacebuilding, particularly focusing on women's grassroots peacebuilding in Ghana. The study reveals the gaps in engaging young women meaningfully in peacebuilding efforts, highlighting the influence of cultural and political prejudices (Paalo, 2022). This insight is crucial for youth empowerment programs in Africa, as it underscores the need for inclusive strategies that address gender and generational disparities.

The concept of integrated urban management, as explored in the comparative study by Sahabi and Hanaei (2020) offers valuable insights into local economic development. This approach, applied in the contexts of Iran and South Africa, demonstrates the significance of participatory urban planning and local economic development strategies in empowering communities (Sahabi & Hanaei, 2020). For youth empowerment in Africa, this suggests the importance of involving young people in urban management and economic planning processes.

Yadollahzadeh, Estelaji, and Fallahtabar (2018), study on the community ecology model of women's empowerment in sustainable rural development further enriches the research approach. Their findings highlight the socio-economic factors influencing the empowerment of rural women, including participation in socio-economic activities and overcoming barriers such as lack of job opportunities and low education levels (Yadollahzadeh, Estelaji, & Fallahtabar, 2018). This model can be adapted to youth empowerment programs, emphasizing the role of socio-economic participation and addressing systemic barriers.

2.1.1. Criteria for Selecting Case Studies

The selection of case studies for examining African youth empowerment programs is guided by several criteria derived from the aforementioned studies. Firstly, the case studies should demonstrate a clear community learning and development strategy, as Fatihin and Rasyad highlighted (2021). Programs that incorporate educational and training components, particularly those enhancing business and economic skills, are prioritized.

Secondly, including diverse demographic groups, especially young women, is a critical criterion, as Paalo (2022) emphasised. Case studies should illustrate efforts to bridge gender and generational gaps in empowerment initiatives.

Thirdly, the involvement of youth in urban management and local economic development, as discussed by Sahabi and Hanaei (2020), is another important criterion. Programs that engage young people in participatory planning and economic activities offer valuable insights into effective empowerment strategies.

Lastly, the case studies should address the socio-economic barriers to youth empowerment, aligning with the findings of Yadollahzadeh, Estelaji, and Fallahtabar (2018). Programs that successfully navigate challenges such as limited job opportunities and educational constraints are particularly relevant.

2.1.2. Outline of the research design and methods used.

The research design for studying youth empowerment in Africa is grounded in systematic reviews and scoping studies. Somefun et al. (2021) highlight the importance of systematically reviewing interventions aimed at adolescent health

and social outcomes, ensuring that these interventions are acceptable and effective for the target demographic. Similarly, Briegal, Biggane, and Obasi (2021) advocate for scoping reviews to evaluate the effectiveness of adolescent alcohol prevention tools in Africa. This approach helps map out the range of tools and create an evidence base for future research. Lewington, Geddes, and Gabagaya (2022) focus on evidence reviews for policy, particularly in female empowerment, emphasizing the need for interventions to be evidence-based and relevant to the specific challenges faced by young women in Africa.

2.2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for African Youth Programs

The selection of African youth programs for study involves specific inclusion and exclusion criteria. Somefun et al. (2021) set criteria based on sustainable development goal indicators and research conducted in Africa, ensuring relevance to developmental challenges. Briegal, Biggane, and Obasi (2021) use the Population – Concept – Context framework, focusing on the effectiveness of tools in African contexts with prevalent adolescent alcohol use. Lewington, Geddes, and Gabagaya (2022) apply criteria based on the relevance, applicability, and quality of studies, particularly in the context of female empowerment in Uganda, ensuring that the programs are equitable and address the unique needs of young women in Africa.

3. Results

3.1. Analysis of African Youth Empowerment Programs

The landscape of youth empowerment in Africa is diverse and dynamic, with various programs addressing the unique challenges faced by young people across the continent. A critical analysis of these programs reveals key components that contribute to their success.

Kågesten et al. (2021) conducted a qualitative study on an empowerment-based behavioral intervention in Nairobi's informal settlements, aimed at preventing sexual violence among adolescents. This intervention was significant in equipping both girls and boys with skills to recognize and resist sexual violence, while also promoting positive, nonviolent masculinities among boys. The study underscores the importance of skilled facilitators and interactive, adolescent-friendly content as crucial to the success of such interventions. This approach aligns with the broader goal of youth empowerment in Africa, which focuses on enhancing the agency and resilience of young people in the face of socio-economic challenges (Kågesten et al., 2021).

In Southeast Nigeria, youthpreneurship has emerged as a vital tool for sustainable development, as explored by Orogbu, Osita, and Onuzulike-Chukwuemeka (2021). Their study highlights the positive correlation between youth empowerment and innovativeness, suggesting that entrepreneurship is a viable pathway for employment and economic growth among young people. This finding is particularly relevant in the context of high youth unemployment rates in many African countries. Promoting youth entrepreneurship programs can be a strategic approach to harness the potential of young Africans, contributing to the region's socio-economic development (Orogbu et al., 2021).

The Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework, as applied in Baltimore City by Rajagopal et al. (2022), offers insights into the utilization of PYD principles by organizations working with African American youth. This study reveals that organizations naturally infuse elements of PYD into their programs, focusing on creating empowering environments and building on youth assets and agency. Although this study is based in the United States, the principles of PYD are universally applicable and can be adapted to African contexts. The emphasis on asset-based approaches and youth agency is particularly relevant for African youth programs, where fostering resilience and self-efficacy is crucial (Rajagopal et al., 2022).

The analysis of African youth empowerment programs reveals a multifaceted approach that includes behavioral interventions, entrepreneurship, and the application of PYD principles. These programs are characterized by their focus on skill development, agency enhancement, and the creation of supportive environments for young people. The success of these programs is contingent upon their relevance to the local context, the involvement of skilled facilitators, and the adaptability of the programs to address the specific needs and challenges faced by African youth. This holistic approach is essential for empowering young Africans, equipping them with the tools and opportunities needed to thrive in their communities and contribute to the continent's socio-economic development.

3.1.1. Key Components of Successful Youth Empowerment Programs in Africa

Youth empowerment programs in Africa have become increasingly significant in addressing the socio-economic challenges faced by the continent's young population. These programs, varying in scope and approach, share key components that contribute to their success.

Accord's (2020) study on youth empowerment for sustainable economic development in Nigeria highlights the critical role of strategic planning and implementation in youth programs. The research emphasizes the need for programs to be designed with sustainability in mind, ensuring they can continue benefiting youth beyond their initial implementation. This involves creating employment and skill development opportunities that align with the country's economic needs. The study also points out the importance of government involvement in these programs, suggesting that a coordinated effort between the public and private sectors can lead to more effective outcomes (Accord, 2020).

In the context of agriculture, Latopa and Abd Rashid (2015) research on youth empowerment through participation in the Youth Integrated Training Farm project in Kwara State, Nigeria, sheds light on the significance of practical, hands-on training. The study reveals that active participation in agricultural projects provides young people with essential skills and empowers them economically, socially, and psychologically. This approach addresses the high rate of youth unemployment by equipping them with the skills needed to succeed in the agricultural sector, which is a major economic driver in many African countries (Latopa & Abd Rashid, 2015).

Geza et al. (2022) conducted a scoping review on the dynamics of youth employment and empowerment in agriculture and rural development in South Africa. Their findings underscore the necessity of inclusivity in policy formulation and implementation. The study points out that while policies and strategies exist to support youth involvement in agriculture, sociopolitical barriers often hinder their effectiveness. To overcome these challenges, the authors recommend connecting rural youth to support services, local employment programs, and including them in policy-making processes. This approach ensures that youth empowerment programs are well-designed, effectively implemented, and tailored to the specific needs of the young population (Geza et al., 2022).

The key components of successful youth empowerment programs in Africa include strategic planning and sustainability, practical skills training, and inclusive policy formulation and implementation. These elements ensure that the programs are effective in the short term and contribute to long-term socio-economic development. By focusing on these components, youth empowerment programs can provide African youth with the tools and opportunities they need to thrive and contribute positively to their communities and the broader economy.

3.1.2. Educational initiatives and vocational training

Educational initiatives and vocational training are pivotal in empowering African youth, offering them the tools and skills necessary for socio-economic development. The DREAMS initiative in Uganda, led by the Uganda Youth Development Link, exemplifies this approach (Kasirye et al., 2023). This multi-component, community-based intervention, funded by the DREAMS initiative in Africa, focused on adolescent girls and young women in rural Uganda, providing vocational training alongside cognitive-behavioral preventive interventions. The program's success is evident in its high uptake, with 89% of participants completing vocational training and many continuing to work in their trained vocations two years post-intervention.

The importance of such educational initiatives is further underscored by Muchiri (2017), who highlights the need for youth-defined development. This approach ensures that youth are passive beneficiaries and active participants in development processes. By involving youth in the planning and execution of educational programs, their unique needs and perspectives are addressed, leading to more effective and sustainable outcomes.

Kabiti, Francis and Kativhu (2019) also emphasise youth's role in community development, noting the need for opportunities that allow them to demonstrate their leadership abilities. Educational initiatives and vocational training programs can serve as platforms for youth to engage in community development, thereby fostering a sense of responsibility and ownership over their futures.

3.1.3. Community Engagement and Leadership Development

Community engagement and leadership development are integral to the success of African youth empowerment programs. The DREAMS initiative's approach to linking young women with existing community leaders for support and guidance is a prime example of effective community engagement (Kasirye et al., 2023). This strategy provides young women with the necessary skills and knowledge and integrates them into a supportive community network.

Muchiri (2017) argues for the meaningful participation of youth in development processes, particularly in projects targeting them. By engaging youth in decision-making and implementation, programs can harness their insights and energy, turning them into agents of change within their communities.

Kabiti, Francis and Kativhu (2019) further highlights the need for changing leaders' attitudes regarding the role of youth in development work. Empowering youth through leadership development initiatives can challenge existing stereotypes and pave the way for more inclusive and effective community development practices.

The combination of educational initiatives, vocational training, community engagement, and leadership development forms a robust framework for youth empowerment in Africa. These components work synergistically to equip youth with the necessary skills, confidence, and support systems to actively contribute to their communities and drive socio-economic development.

3.1.4. Socio-economic impacts on the youth and community

The socio-economic impacts of youth empowerment programs in Africa are profound and multifaceted. In Nigeria, the Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES) has significantly improved the standard of living for its beneficiaries, leading to self-reliance and reduced poverty levels in states like Niger, Kaduna, and Zamfara (Musa et al., 2022). YES's success is a testament to the potential of targeted empowerment programs in transforming the lives of young people, particularly in regions plagued by high unemployment and poverty.

In Uganda, a randomized control trial focusing on women's empowerment revealed that multifaceted policy interventions, including vocational training and education on sex, reproduction, and marriage, led to increased engagement in income-generating activities and a decrease in teen pregnancy and early marriage (Bandiera et al., 2020). This indicates that comprehensive empowerment programs can have far-reaching socio-economic benefits, not only for the youth but also for the broader community.

In Burundi, the implementation of 4-H School Gardening Programs, guided by Empowerment Theory, addressed the needs of educators and youth in rural communities (Deen et al., 2017). These programs tackled barriers like poverty and hunger, which are critical to improving the quality of education and overall community development.

3.1.5. Long-term Sustainability of Empowerment Programs

The long-term sustainability of youth empowerment programs is crucial for ongoing socio-economic development. Despite its initial success in Kano State, Nigeria, the Economic and Social Empowerment Scheme faced challenges such as inadequate funding and ineffective monitoring (Gwadabe & Ab Rahman, 2020). These issues highlight the importance of sustainable funding, effective management, and transparent governance in ensuring the longevity and impact of empowerment programs.

The sustainability of such programs also depends on their adaptability and responsiveness to the changing needs of youth and communities. The integration of community members and stakeholders in the conceptualization and implementation of programs, as recommended by Musa et al. (2022), is vital for creating programs that are relevant, effective, and sustainable.

African youth empowerment programs have demonstrated significant socio-economic impacts, contributing to self-reliance, poverty alleviation, and community development. However, the sustainability of these programs requires careful planning, adequate funding, effective management, and community involvement. By addressing these factors, empowerment programs can continue to play a pivotal role in the socio-economic development of African nations.

3.2. Lessons for U.S. Youth Development Programs

The exploration of youth empowerment programs in Africa offers invaluable insights for enhancing U.S. youth development initiatives. The diverse strategies employed in African contexts, as exemplified in the studies by Webster et al. (2013), Musa et al. (2022), and Marttinen et al. (2019), provide a rich array of adaptable approaches for the U.S. setting.

Webster et al. (2013) discuss a youth development model in the Caribbean that emphasizes the importance of social, cultural, ethnic, and resource diversity in program design. This model's adaptability to different country circumstances highlights the need for U.S. programs to be flexible and culturally sensitive, catering to the diverse needs of various communities. Similarly, the Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES) in Nigeria, as studied by Musa et al. (2022), underscores

the impact of empowerment initiatives on youth self-reliance and poverty alleviation. The success of YES in improving living standards and reducing poverty among youth in Nigeria serves as a model for U.S. programs to integrate socio-economic goals into youth development.

Marttinen et al. (2019) examine the REACH Harlem program, which focuses on empowering young urban boys through sports and other activities. This program's emphasis on creating safe spaces and engaging activities that resonate with youth interests is a crucial lesson for U.S. urban youth development initiatives. The integration of sportsmanship, culture, power, and communication within the program aligns with the broader objectives of positive youth development and can be effectively applied in the U.S. context.

4. Discussion

4.1. Comparative Effectiveness

The comparative effectiveness of youth empowerment programs in Africa and their potential applicability in the U.S. context presents a unique opportunity to analyze cross-cultural implementation and adaptation of youth development strategies. Rashid et al. (2017) provide a compelling example of how interventions proven effective in one context can be translated and implemented in another, particularly among minority communities. Their study focused on lifestyle, medication adherence, and self-care interventions for chronic diseases among Black, Hispanic, and Asian residents in Chicago and Houston, revealing significant improvements in health outcomes and knowledge. This approach underscores the importance of cultural competency and tailored interventions, which are crucial for the successful implementation of African youth empowerment models in the U.S.

Hyde et al. (2020) further emphasize the role of school-based programs in enhancing physical activity among students. Their research in Georgia demonstrated the effectiveness of comprehensive school-based physical activity programs, leading to significant increases in daily steps and physical activity levels. This finding is particularly relevant for U.S. youth development programs, suggesting that incorporating physical activity and health education into school curricula can be a powerful tool for youth empowerment. The success of such programs in diverse settings indicates the potential for African youth empowerment strategies, particularly those focusing on physical and health education, to be adapted in the U.S.

Niankara et al. (2020) explore the empowering nature of information and communication technology (ICT) resources for youth, particularly in the context of the Middle East. Their study highlights the significant impact of ICT resources on youth well-being and sense of belonging in school. This insight is critical for U.S. youth programs, as it suggests that integrating technology and digital literacy into youth empowerment initiatives can significantly enhance their effectiveness. The success of ICT integration in youth programs in different cultural contexts, including those in Africa, provides a valuable lesson for U.S. youth development strategies.

4.2. Analysis of the effectiveness of African programs in the U.S. context

Analyzing the effectiveness of African youth empowerment programs within the U.S. context requires a nuanced understanding of cultural, social, and educational dynamics. The studies by Rashid et al. (2017) and Hyde et al. (2020) demonstrate the potential for successful adaptation of programs across different cultural settings, provided there is a strong emphasis on cultural competency and contextual relevance. For instance, the adaptation of health and lifestyle interventions for minority communities in the U.S. shows how African youth empowerment strategies, particularly those focused on health education and lifestyle changes, can be effectively implemented in a U.S. setting.

Moreover, as discussed by Niankara et al. (2020), the role of ICT is particularly pertinent. The integration of technology in youth programs not only enhances learning and engagement but also prepares young individuals for a rapidly digitalizing world. This aspect is crucial for U.S. youth programs, where technology plays a significant role in education and social interaction. African youth empowerment programs that effectively utilize ICT can offer valuable insights into incorporating technology in a way that is both empowering and relevant to the needs and interests of young people in the U.S.

The comparative analysis of African youth empowerment programs and their potential application in the U.S. reveals key areas of alignment and adaptation. Cultural competency, integration of health and physical education, and the effective use of ICT emerge as critical components for the successful implementation of these programs in a U.S. context. This analysis highlights the potential for cross-cultural learning and adaptation and underscores the importance of tailoring youth empowerment strategies to meet different communities' specific needs and contexts.

4.2.1. Potential Barriers to Implementing African Youth Empowerment Models in the U.S.

Implementing African youth empowerment models in the United States presents unique challenges due to cultural, economic, and systemic differences. The success of such programs in Africa, as evidenced in Burundi and Ghana, offers valuable insights but also highlights potential barriers when adapting these models to the U.S. context.

In Burundi, the 4-H School Gardening Programs have demonstrated significant impact in empowering youth and communities (Deen et al., 2017). These programs, grounded in Empowerment Theory, focus on addressing basic needs like poverty and hunger, which are primary barriers to education and development. However, when considering the implementation of similar models in the U.S., it is essential to recognize that the socio-economic challenges faced by American youth might differ. While poverty and hunger are also issues in the U.S., they are often intertwined with other complex factors like racial inequality, urban-rural divides, and varying educational standards across states. Therefore, a direct transplantation of the Burundian model might require significant adaptation to address these diverse and context-specific challenges.

The Youth Enrichment through Sport (YES) program in Ghana, funded by the U.S. Department of State, provides another perspective (Ramos & Young, 2022). This program used recreational sports as a mechanism to intervene in negative youth health behaviors, emphasizing the development of life skills such as self-confidence and empathy. While this model shows promise, its application in the U.S. might encounter barriers in terms of resource allocation and differing priorities in youth development. In the U.S., where there is a plethora of youth programs, integrating a new model like YES requires navigating existing structures and funding mechanisms, which can be highly competitive and politically influenced.

Furthermore, Latopa and Abd Rashid (2015) study on youth empowerment in agriculture in Nigeria underscores the importance of understanding local contexts. The decline in youth participation in these programs was attributed to unmet empowerment incentives, such as startup capital. Transferring this model to the U.S. would necessitate understanding American youths' motivations and the economic realities they face. Unlike in many African contexts, American youth might have different career aspirations and opportunities, which means that programs focusing on agriculture or similar sectors might not resonate as strongly or meet their perceived needs and aspirations.

While African youth empowerment models offer innovative approaches, their implementation in the U.S. requires careful consideration of cultural, economic, and systemic differences. Tailoring these models to fit the unique American context, addressing local needs, and ensuring the alignment of incentives and motivations are crucial for their successful adaptation and impact.

4.3. Strategic Recommendations for Integrating Lessons from Africa into U.S. Programs

The integration of lessons from African youth empowerment initiatives into U.S. programs requires a nuanced understanding of the cultural, social, and economic contexts that shape youth experiences in both regions. The case study of 4-H Senegal by Archibald et al. (2021) provides a compelling example of how Positive Youth Development (PYD) programs can be adapted to meet the specific needs of African youth. This model emphasizes the importance of cultural responsiveness and relevance, which are crucial for the successful implementation of youth programs in different cultural settings.

In the U.S., where diversity is a defining characteristic, the lessons from 4-H Senegal can be instrumental in designing programs catering to various cultural backgrounds. For instance, the program's focus on community engagement and leadership development can be integrated into U.S. youth programs to foster a sense of belonging and empowerment among diverse youth populations. This approach aligns with Jones's (2005) study on the experiences of African-American faculty in predominantly white institutions, highlighting the need for environments that acknowledge and celebrate cultural diversity.

Furthermore, the case of women's empowerment programs in Somalia, as discussed by Elmi and Simba (2016), underscores the significance of gender-sensitive approaches in youth programs. The U.S. can draw from these experiences to enhance the inclusivity of its youth programs, ensuring that they address the unique challenges faced by young women and other marginalized groups.

U.S. programs must adopt a flexible and adaptive approach to effectively integrate these lessons. This involves continuous learning and modification of programs based on feedback from participants and an ongoing assessment of their cultural relevance. Additionally, partnerships between African and U.S. youth organizations can facilitate the exchange of ideas and best practices, enriching the youth empowerment initiatives in both contexts.

The integration of African youth empowerment lessons into U.S. programs offers an opportunity to enhance the effectiveness and inclusivity of these initiatives. By embracing cultural responsiveness, gender sensitivity, and community engagement, U.S. programs can better address the diverse needs of their youth populations, fostering an environment of empowerment and growth.

4.3.1. Proposals for integrating lessons from Africa into U.S. programs.

The integration of African youth empowerment models into U.S. youth development programs requires a nuanced understanding of the unique socio-cultural contexts of both regions. Drawing from the experiences of Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in the realm of mentorship and community engagement, U.S. programs can benefit from adopting certain key elements that have proven successful in African contexts.

Ssewamala et al. (2014) highlight the effectiveness of mentorship in their study of AIDS-orphaned children in Uganda. The mentorship component, structured around a comprehensive curriculum, provided these children with opportunities to develop future plans and strengthen psychosocial well-being. This approach underscores the importance of mentorship in fostering resilience and positive life trajectories in vulnerable youth populations. The U.S. can adapt this model by incorporating structured mentorship programs in youth development initiatives, especially for at-risk groups, to facilitate similar positive outcomes.

Lautenbach and Batchelor (2012) discuss the integration of technology in education, emphasizing the disconnect between student engagement in technology and its relevance in professional development. This reflection is pertinent to U.S. contexts, where technology is a significant aspect of youth development. The South African experience suggests that while technology integration is essential, it must be meaningful and aligned with the students' future professional needs. U.S. programs could benefit from this insight by ensuring that technological components in youth programs are not just advanced but also relevant and tailored to the long-term professional aspirations of the youth.

Ferrera (2017) provides a compelling case study on health promotion among immigrant communities in Chicago, integrating principles of positive minority youth development. Given its diverse demographic landscape, this approach is particularly relevant for the U.S.. The study highlights the importance of community-based participatory research (CBPR) in understanding and addressing the unique needs of minority youth. U.S. youth programs can adopt CBPR methods to develop and implement initiatives that are more responsive to the specific needs of minority and immigrant youth populations.

Integrating African youth empowerment models into U.S. programs necessitates carefully considering the contextual differences and similarities between the two regions. By adopting structured mentorship, relevant technological integration, and CBPR approaches, U.S. youth development programs can enhance their effectiveness and inclusivity, drawing valuable lessons from the African experience.

4.4. Emerging Trends and Future Directions in Youth Empowerment and Development Programs in Africa

The landscape of youth empowerment and development programs in Africa is rapidly evolving, with new trends and future directions emerging as key focal points. Catalano et al. (2019) provide a comprehensive overview of Positive Youth Development (PYD) programs in low- and middle-income countries, highlighting their efficacy and potential for broader application. These programs, which focus on a range of outcomes including health, employment, and civic engagement, are increasingly seen as vital for fostering gender equality and social empowerment among the youth. The study underscores the need for more rigorous examination and long-term follow-up to establish the benefits of these programs, similar to those observed in higher-income countries.

In the context of sustainable development, Orogbu, Osita, and Onuzulike-Chukwuemeka (2021) explore the concept of 'youthpreneurship' as a gateway to sustainable development in Southeast Nigeria. Their findings reveal a significant positive relationship between youth empowerment and innovativeness, suggesting that entrepreneurship is a crucial pathway for youth employment and economic development. The study emphasizes the importance of creating more youth empowerment programs as a priority for governments and other stakeholders, highlighting the role of entrepreneurship in addressing unemployment and fostering economic growth.

Kativhu, Francis and Khosa (2018) delves into the realm of youth voluntary participation in rural community development, particularly in the Mutoko District of Zimbabwe. The research identifies various strategies to promote youth volunteering, taking into account factors like geographical location and gender. The findings suggest that tailored strategies are essential for enhancing youth participation in volunteering, which is a critical component of community development and social responsibility.

These emerging trends and future research directions in Africa's youth empowerment and development programs reflect a growing recognition of the youth's pivotal role in driving sustainable development. The focus on PYD interventions, youthpreneurship, and volunteering underscores the diverse approaches that can harness young people's potential. As these programs continue to evolve, they offer promising avenues for addressing the challenges faced by the youth in Africa, while also contributing to broader societal and economic objectives.

5. Conclusion

This study embarked on a comprehensive exploration of youth empowerment in Africa, with the aim of extracting valuable insights for enhancing youth development programs in the United States. The objectives set forth at the onset have been adeptly met through meticulous analysis, offering a rich tapestry of understanding and strategic direction.

Firstly, the demographic landscape of Africa's youth was thoroughly examined, revealing a burgeoning young population that holds immense potential for socio-economic transformation. This demographic shift underscores the urgency and significance of youth empowerment as a pivotal force in driving sustainable development. The comparative analysis between African and U.S. youth development paradigms illuminated diverse approaches, emphasizing the value of contextualized strategies while fostering a mutual exchange of ideas and practices.

The study delved into various successful youth programs across Africa, showcasing how innovative, community-centric models have effectively nurtured youth capabilities, thereby contributing to educational, vocational, and societal advancements. These success stories serve as a beacon, guiding the U.S. in adapting similar frameworks that resonate with their unique socio-cultural dynamics.

Challenges, albeit significant, did not overshadow the triumphs within African youth empowerment initiatives. These programs have demonstrated resilience and adaptability, overcoming resource constraints and socio-political hurdles to achieve notable impacts. This resilience is a critical lesson for U.S. programs, advocating for flexibility and perseverance in the face of adversity.

The relevance of African models to the U.S. context emerged distinctly, advocating for a more inclusive, community-driven approach in American youth development strategies. The evolution of youth empowerment strategies in Africa, marked by an increasing emphasis on entrepreneurship and technology, offers a forward-looking perspective for U.S. programs.

In conclusion, this study met its aims and objectives and provided a rich repository of knowledge and practical recommendations. It underscores the transformative power of youth empowerment and advocates for its integration into the fabric of global youth development strategies. The findings and recommendations of this study serve as a cornerstone for future endeavors in youth empowerment, both in Africa and beyond, paving the way for a more inclusive, empowered, and prosperous global youth community.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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