

# The Role Of Ngos in Poverty Eradication in Nigeria: A Study Of Selected Communities in Kwara State

By

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## Abstract

**P**overty is an issue that ravaged every part of the world, Nigeria and Kwara state inclusive. With the nation rich in human and material resources, the apparent disconnection between such endowment and poverty rate has become worrisome. It is against this background that the study examines such impact of Non-State Actors (NGOs) intervention on poverty alleviation in selected communities of kwara state. Quantitative and qualitative source of data was established in both primary and secondary form. While the quantitative data was analyzed via questionnaires from selected communities across the three senatorial districts of the state, qualitative data elicited information through secondary sources such as journals, textbooks and internet. A performance failure theory captured the essence of Non-State Actors in poverty alleviation in the selected communities

*.The research identifies absent of road map, lack of fund and language barrier between the NGOs and the locals. It was also discover that some communities faced impediments such as absent of farm implements, lack of access to information and deficiency in outreach programs especially public policies. The study recommends an established synergy between Government and Non-Governmental Organizations for a better policy output, road facilities to the public through Rural Access and Agricultural Marketing Project (RAAMP), modern communication equipment and safety mechanism. Encouraging Government Non-Governmental Organisations (GONGO) to enhance good monitoring of government policies by the NGOs along with an established rural settlement embedded with good feedback mechanism and data collection had been put forward for the research work.*

**Keywords:** Multidimensional poverty index, non-governmental organisation, human development index, Poverty Eradication

## Introduction

Poverty has multidimensional definition, with pattern changes over time (Ewetan, 2007; Kehinde, 2009). According to Hornby (2001) poverty is perceived as state of social, economic and political inferiority. It challenges various income and consumption across the world eg in about 110 countries, 1.1 billion people, or slightly over 18% of the 6.1 billion people are living in acute multidimensional poverty. According to Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI, 2023) sproximately five out of every six impoverished people live in South Asia (389 million) and Sub-Saharan Africa (534 million). The world poverty rate can be tag to variety of issues, such as the unsatisfactory growth of the economy, the underdeveloped human resource base, low wages and productivity in the some sectors, unsuitability of microeconomic policies, and imperfections in the labour market that result in unemployment (Adeyeye, 2007). Also, numbers of factors that require immediate attention in order to save the majority of people from poverty, include corruption, bad governance, the rate of population growth, the nature of the economy, and the lack of basic

infrastructure Owolabi (2009).

In Nigeria, poverty remains a significant challenge despite successive government interventions. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2023), about 133 million Nigerians are classified as multidimensionally poor. Poverty distribution, however, varies across states. For instance, Kwara State records an estimated 18.5 percent multidimensionally poor population, a figure higher than Lagos State (10.1 percent) and Ondo State (9.5 percent) (NBS, 2023). These figures highlight that, although Kwara performs better than many northern states with higher poverty rates, poverty levels remain considerably high compared to some southern counterparts.

Over the years, Nigerian administrations have introduced a series of poverty reduction programmes aimed at alleviating these conditions (Adebayo, 2022). Nevertheless, as Aghahowa and Atuanya (1995) argue, the nation continues to experience economic regression and rising poverty, thereby necessitating the intervention of non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The term NGO encompasses a broad spectrum of entities, including non-profits, religious institutions, private voluntary organisations, and civil society organisations (Megann & Johnson, 2006). NGOs are widely recognised as non-profit actors in international

development and grassroots welfare improvement, particularly in developing countries (Werker & Ahmed, 2017). They take multiple forms such as Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), Private Voluntary Organisations (PVOs), Voluntary Organisations (VOs), Charitable Organisations (COs), Non-Governmental Institutions (NGIs), Community-Based Organisations (CBOs), Social Movement Organisations (SMOs), Self-Help Organisations (SHOs), and the Independent Sector (IS).

### **Statement of Problem**

Nigeria is endowed with enormous quantities of petroleum and other natural resources such as natural gas, tin, iron ore, zinc, and arable land. Nevertheless, the level of poverty in the country remains astronomically high and politically embarrassing given its human and mineral wealth. Nigeria ranks 160th out of 189 countries on the Human Development Index (HDI) (UNDP, 2020), reflecting deep developmental challenges. Poverty in the country is shaped by demographic and structural factors such as food insecurity, poor health outcomes, low educational attainment, high unemployment, inflation, and unstable exchange rates. Unless these interconnected aspects are addressed, the nation remains trapped in persistent poverty.

At the subnational level, disparities become more evident. Specifically, Kwara State records an estimated 18.5 percent of its population as multidimensionally poor, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2022). This figure is comparatively higher than poverty levels in states such as Imo (14.2 percent), Edo (12.6 percent), Ekiti (12.5 percent), Anambra (10.9 percent), Abia (10.1 percent), and Ondo (9.5 percent). These figures demonstrate that Kwara, though not among the poorest states in Nigeria, still faces significant poverty challenges compared to several southern states with lower indices.

Recognising these realities, Utuk (2014) observes that in recent years there has been greater recognition of non-state actors as important partners in development. This study, therefore, seeks to examine the role of non-governmental organisations in poverty alleviation within selected communities in Kwara State. While existing literature has engaged poverty reduction broadly in Nigeria, there remains a paucity of studies that specifically explore the extent to which NGOs contribute to poverty reduction in Kwara communities. This study intends to fill that gap.

### **Research Objectives**

The main objective is to examine the relationship between NGO and various

communities in kwara state, while the specific objectives are;

1. To examine the approaches used by NGOs to intervene in community development.
2. To ascertain the level of development brought by NGOs to the communities

## **Literature Review**

### **Conceptual Clarification**

Conceptual clarification is the systematic analysis of abstract concepts through the investigation of examples, the identification of essential and non-essential attributes, and the establishment of operational meanings relevant to a given study. For this research, three interrelated concepts are clarified: Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO), Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), and Poverty.

### **Concept of Non-Governmental Organisation**

Non-Governmental Organisations are a subset of non-state actors that function independently of both government and private business structures. Their establishment reflects the need for social responsibility and community-based development. Ball and Dunn (2013) describe NGOs as non-profit agencies that voluntarily serve the public interest, are autonomously managed, and are not

driven by personal profit or self-service. Similarly, Stephenson (2009) highlights NGOs as entrepreneurial organisations that engage in activities to relieve suffering, protect the environment, deliver essential social services, and promote community development.

Scholarly discourse on NGOs further stresses their dual role as both service providers and advocacy actors. Edwards and Hulme (1996) argue that NGOs bridge the gap between citizens and the state, particularly in contexts where state capacity is weak. This is consistent with Lewis and Kanji (2009), who emphasise that NGOs often act as development intermediaries, mobilising resources and expertise to address poverty at local levels. Within the Nigerian context, NGOs have been instrumental in complementing government poverty alleviation programmes, especially in states like Kwara where poverty remains persistent despite state-led interventions (Adebayo, 2022).

### **Concept of Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI)**

The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) is an internationally recognised metric developed by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). It measures household deprivations across multiple dimensions including education, health, living standards,

employment, and access to basic services (Alkire & Santos, 2014). Unlike income-based poverty measures, the MPI captures the intensity and breadth of poverty by assessing overlapping deprivations within households.

In Nigeria, the MPI has been adopted and adapted by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), in collaboration with agencies such as the National Social Safety-Nets Coordinating Office (NASSCO), UNICEF, and UNDP. According to NBS (2022), Nigeria records 133 million people (63% of the population) as multidimensionally poor. At the subnational level, Kwara State records 18.5 percent multidimensional poverty, which is significantly higher than states such as Ondo (9.5 percent) and Abia (10.1 percent). These statistics underscore the uneven distribution of poverty and the urgent need for NGO interventions in states like Kwara.

### **Concept of Poverty**

Poverty is a complex, multidimensional phenomenon that extends beyond income deprivation. The World Bank (2018) defines poverty as pronounced deprivation in well-being, encompassing low incomes, lack of basic needs, limited access to health and education, insecurity, and lack of political voice. Sen's (1999) Capability Approach provides a more comprehensive perspective by viewing poverty as the deprivation of basic capabilities the freedom to achieve

valued ways of living rather than simply a lack of income.

In Nigeria, poverty manifests in both monetary and non-monetary forms, with drivers including unemployment, inflation, conflict, weak governance, and unequal distribution of resources (Ajakaiye & Olomola, 2013). The persistence of poverty, despite Nigeria's natural resource endowments, reflects structural inequalities and policy implementation gaps. For Kwara State, with nearly one-fifth of its population classified as multidimensionally poor (NBS, 2022), poverty reflects inadequate access to education, health, and sustainable livelihoods. This reality necessitates the role of NGOs as complementary actors in delivering social services and fostering local development initiatives.

### **Non-Governmental Organisations in Nigeria**

The activity of Mary Selessor in Calabar, about 1901, is the origin of non-governmental organisations' operations in Nigeria. She put up a fierce fight to make sure twins were no longer viewed as evil and put to death. McGregor established the Lagos Ladies League to provide schools with quinine. This kind of organisation was not registered, yet it operated just like one. The Catholic Mission in Nigeria, a non-governmental

organisation focused on faith, was responsible for the establishment of the country's first hospital, Sacred Heart Hospital in Abeokuta (M C Fubara, 2009).

Although colonial control was the cause of NGOs in Nigeria prior to independence, these voluntary action NGOs are not registered but rooted in the communitarian philosophy (MC Fubara, 2002). A number of factors including military rule, religion, violence, ethnicity, and corruption contributed to their rise after independence (Iheme, 2002). Following Nigeria's independence, the country had a civil war, during which time NGOs stepped in to aid the victims. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), founded in 1963, was one of the most notable of these. The 1949 Geneva Conventions served as the foundation for this body's mandate. The two other organisations, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (RCCS), offer knowledge and support in the areas of war, surgery, emergency care during hostilities, first aid, basic medical supplies and prescription drugs for emergencies, physiotherapy, and orthopaedic rehabilitation for war-wounded individuals.

Thematic areas for NGOs vary based on their passions; some include health, gender or empowerment, the environment, skill development, etc.

Based on their alphabet, theme, and functions, they are available throughout the states of the federation and operate throughout Nigeria.

## **Empirical Review**

Research into impoverished people's in Africa shows a great inequality in poverty level. Sub-Saharan Africa is one of the worst of poverty at the moment with lowest levels of socio-economy development, high rate of violence, extreme level of instability, and low standards of living (World Bank, 2020). These countries lives below poverty line of 2.15 US dollar per day, with 462 million of them living in extreme poverty in 2023 (UNCTAD, 2023).

Nigeria living in poverty is more than 25% of all potential deprivation (NBS,2022)Between 2015 and 2022, growth rates decreased and GDP per capita flattened, due to established policy. Monetary and exchanges rate policies become increasingly distortive and eroded confidence, fiscal deficits increased due to lower oil production and costly subsidies (for electricity, gasoline and implicitly to maintain an increasingly overvalued official exchange rate), while trade protectionism increased. The stated situations affected every countries including Nigeria, focus of kwara state communities is centered in this research.

By and large, (NBS 2022) established Kwara state with 18.5% ranking 28th out of 36 states of the Federation with Delta, Osun, Imo, Edo, Ekiti, Anambra, Abia, Lagos and Ondo states leading the group. Ewetan (2005) emphasized defines that poverty may be chronic / structured or conjectural / transient. Structural or chronic poverty is long-term or persistent. Its causes are more permanent and depend on a number of factors such as limited productive resources, lack of skill for gainful employment, locational disadvantage or endemic socio-political and cultural factors.

### **Poverty Contributive Agents in Nigeria**

Multidimensional level of poverty in Nigeria cut across access to quality food, education, employment, medical facilities, living standard of an individual within the nation. Ibietan, Chidozie, and Ujara (2014) identified a number of factors that contribute to Nigeria's widespread poverty, including limited access to the market for goods and services, a subpar educational system that results in low self-esteem, a lack of employment opportunities, a lack of assets and physical capital, inadequate human capital development and investment, a lacklustre execution of programmes aimed at reducing poverty, and natural disasters like floods, droughts, and war.

On the other hand, Salam et al. (2020)

determined that inadequate economic foundations, inadequate infrastructure development in rural areas that contributes to rural-urban migration, ineffective economic development plans, and unfavourable attitudes towards work, culture, and heritage are the main causes of poverty. Their claim bears similarities to the factors that the UNDP (2016) identified as the main drivers of poverty in Africa, including but not limited to low productivity brought on by a shortage of skilled labour, corruption, and a flawed institutional framework that encourages the massive accumulation of wealth by a small number of privileged individuals, labour market distortion that introduces various forms of rigidities and difficult employment criteria, and discrimination based on age, sex, religion, and ethnicity. From contributions above, labour market distortion can be observed as major factor that contribute to poverty level in Nigeria.

### **Theoretical Review**

#### **Performance Failure Theory**

One of the earliest economic theories concerning the activities of non-governmental organisations is performance failure theory. It was formulated by Burton Weisbrod (1975) from his seminal work "Towards a Theory of the Voluntary Non-profit Sector in a Three-Sector economy." According to the hypothesis, market

failure resulting from supply public goods provision and governmental shortcomings regarding the unmet need for public goods that persists in society are the main causes of NGOs' existence. Weisbrod thus suggested that in order to complement the public goods and provide an alternative to the communal goods provided by the private sector, a collection of volunteer organisations will arise as extra-governmental providers of collective consumption goods (Weisbrod, 1975). In Essence, NGOs exist as a result of governmental failure with regard to the residual unsatisfied demand for public goods in the society and market failure due to non-optimal provision of public goods. Essentially, the Nigerian government's inability to supply the necessary public goods such as effective electricity, effective water supply, adequate employment, food production and adequate health care necessitate the advent of NGOs.

### **Research Design**

The research adopted a mixed method of key informant interview, and survey research design. While the key informant's interview is used to determine the approaches used by NGOs to intervene in community development, survey questionnaires has adopted to determine the extent of level of development brought by NGOs to the study areas. While the primary data is source through key informant interview, and structured

questionnaires with respect to the study areas, the secondary data were elicited from relevant textbooks, and journals.

Also, a combination of quantitative and qualitative data was derived from the two sources of primary and secondary data. The quantitative data is been collected via the use of questionnaires and qualitative data from oral interviews via the key informants (NGOs). Equally, quantitative and qualitative data were extracted from other secondary sources such as journals, and textbooks.

Population for the study is the six local government areas of the three senatorial districts within Kwara state. Two local government were selected in each of the senatorial district on a bases a local government of higher population and the second with low population (for easy representativeness) The study covered six Local Government Areas (LGAs) drawn from the three senatorial districts of Kwara State with a combined population of 4,341 (Ilorin East – 987, Asa – 628, Baruten – 1,057, Moro – 468, Ifelodun – 812, Offa – 389). Using the Taro Yamane formula ( $N = 4,341$ ;  $e = 0.05$ ), the minimum sample size was calculated as 366 respondents. To strengthen representativeness, 400 questionnaires were proportionately distributed across the six LGAs based on their staff population.

## Results and Data Presentation

### Questionnaire Distribution and Response Rate

**Table 1: Allotted Questionnaire to Each Local Government Area**

Name of LGA	Staff Population	No. of Allotted Questionnaire	No. of Returned Questionnaire	% Returned
Ilorin East	987	91	89	97.8%
Asa	628	58	56	96.6%
Baruten	1,057	97	88	90.7%
Moro	468	43	41	95.3%
Ifelodun	812	75	73	97.3%
Offa	389	36	31	86.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,341</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>378</b>	<b>94.5%</b>

*Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2025.*

Out of 400 questionnaires administered across the six LGAs, 378 were retrieved, representing a 94.5 percent return rate. This is a highly reliable response rate and provides a strong foundation for analysis.

## Respondents' Bio-Data

**Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by Sex**

LGA	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (100%)
Ilorin East	59.6	40.4	89
Asa	45.0	55.0	56
Baruten	80.2	19.2	73
Moro	35.5	64.5	31
Ifelodun	78.1	21.9	41
Offa	83.0	17.0	88

Observation: Majority of respondents in Baruten, Moro, and Ifelodun were male, while Offa and Asa recorded more female respondents.

**Table 2: Occupation**

Occupation	Ilorin East	Asa	Ifelodun	Offa	Moro	Baruten
Civil Servant	73%	87.5%	100%	100%	95.1%	78.4%
Political Appointee	9%	10.7%	0%	0%	4.9%	0%
Elected Council Member	0%	1.8%	0%	0%	0%	1.1%
Others	18%	0%	0%	0%	0%	20.5%

Observation: Civil servants overwhelmingly dominated the respondent pool, indicating that much of the sample population was drawn from government-employed staff.

## NGOs' Interventions in Kwara Communities

Table 6: Respondents' Opinions on NGOs' Contributions

Intervention Area	Yes (%)	No (%)	Don't Know (%)
Provision of medical expenses	43.7	36.5	19.8
Provision of educational materials	45.5	31.2	23.3
Skills acquisition training	41.8	38.6	19.6
Provision of farming implements	40.2	34.1	25.7
Provision of drinking water (boreholes)	41.3	41.5	17.2
Entrepreneurship development	59.0	31.7	9.3
Advocacy and sensitisation (good governance)	49.5	39.4	11.1
Direct financial distribution (cash gifts)	41.3	48.2	10.5

Source: FieldSurvey,2024

### Observation:

Respondents generally acknowledged NGO interventions in health, education, skills acquisition, agriculture, and entrepreneurship. The highest recognition was in entrepreneurship development (59%). Direct money distribution was mostly rejected, with 48.2 percent saying NGOs do not provide cash handouts in their communities.

The survey findings show that NGOs are active in diverse sectors across Kwara State, particularly in health, education, skills acquisition, and entrepreneurship

development. However, respondents strongly indicated that direct financial distribution is not a typical feature of NGO operations. The demographic profile reveals a respondent pool dominated by civil servants with tertiary education, mainly within the 31–50 age group, which suggests an informed perspective on NGOs' activities.

### Discussion of Findings

NGOs' Interventions in Poverty Alleviation in Kwara State

The quantitative findings reveal that NGOs play a significant role in entrepreneurship development, education support, health services, and skills acquisition across the six selected LGAs. The highest proportion of respondents (59 percent) affirmed that NGOs actively engage in entrepreneurship development, while 45.5 percent acknowledged the provision of educational materials and 43.7 percent reported support for medical expenses. By contrast, respondents largely dismissed the idea that NGOs engage in direct money distribution, with 48.2 percent saying “No” compared to 41.3 percent who said “Yes.”

These results align with interview accounts. For instance, a government youth officer in Ilorin East noted that:

“NGOs here rarely give out money directly; instead, they sponsor trainings in tailoring, ICT, and small businesses. They prefer sustainability to one-off cash donations.” (KII-GOV-ILR-01)

This perception reinforces the survey data which shows greater recognition of skills acquisition and entrepreneurship initiatives rather than financial hand-outs. Similarly, a participant in the Ifelodun FGD observed:

“Our community has benefited from boreholes and school materials provided by NGOs, but nobody has seen them dis-

tributing money.” (FGD-IFE-02)

Such qualitative insights validate the rejection of direct money-sharing as an NGO strategy.

### **Sectoral Focus of NGO Interventions**

The data further indicate strong NGO engagement in health and education, with 43.7 percent and 45.5 percent of respondents acknowledging interventions in these sectors respectively. This aligns with Adebayo (2022), who asserts that Nigerian NGOs often focus on health and educational empowerment as gateways to poverty alleviation.

However, the picture is uneven across LGAs. In Baruten and Moro, where poverty indices are higher, respondents were more likely to emphasise NGO roles in farming implements and boreholes, suggesting a rural focus. An academic respondent in Baruten explained:

“In rural areas, NGOs know our greatest need is farming tools and water supply. Without these, other interventions may not succeed.” (KII-EDU-BAR-05)

This contrasts with Offa and Asa LGAs, where NGOs were said to prioritise educational and entrepreneurial support, reflecting a more urban orientation.

## **Gender and Education Dynamics**

The demographic analysis shows that male respondents dominated in Baruten, Moro, and Ifelodun, while Asa and Offa had more female respondents. Interestingly, women in Asa highlighted the importance of NGO educational support:

“Many women here did not complete school, so the books and training brought by NGOs help our children continue where we stopped.” (FGD-ASA-03)

This reflects Sen’s (1999) Capability Approach, where education expands individual and community freedoms, thereby reducing poverty. The gender-disaggregated responses thus demonstrate how NGO interventions meet differentiated needs across communities.

## **Civil Servants as Key Respondents**

Civil servants formed the overwhelming majority of respondents (above 70 percent in all LGAs). This may have influenced perceptions since many civil servants directly interact with NGOs through formal programmes. For instance, a civil servant in Moro stated:

“We work with NGOs to deliver health awareness campaigns in rural communities, but sometimes people think it is government work because we implement together.” (KII-GOV-MOR-02)

This blurring of roles between government and NGOs complicates attribution, but also highlights the complementary relationship between both actors in poverty alleviation.

## **Divergences and Contradictions**

While most respondents affirmed NGO contributions, some interviewees expressed skepticism. A political appointee in Asa remarked:

“Some NGOs appear only during donor cycles; once funds finish, they disappear. That is why people say they don’t see them often.” (KII-POL-ASA-04)

This observation tempers the survey’s positive outlook, showing that while interventions exist, sustainability and consistency remain challenges.

These findings are consistent with Lewis and Kanji (2009), who emphasise that NGO effectiveness depends not only on service delivery but also on institutional capacity and accountability.

## **Conclusion**

This study has demonstrated that Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) play a critical role in poverty alleviation in Kwara State by prioritising sustainable interventions such as entrepreneurship development, skills acqui-

sition, education, and health services, rather than short-term monetary hand-outs. The findings reveal that communities place greater value on empowerment initiatives that build long-term resilience and enhance livelihoods. Nonetheless, the operations of NGOs are constrained by man-made challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, insecurity, and limited government support. Strengthening the synergy between government institutions and NGOs is therefore essential for poverty reduction strategies to yield inclusive and lasting outcomes.

## **Recommendations**

### **1. Strengthen Government–NGO Partnerships**

Government should institutionalise frameworks for collaboration with NGOs, not only through consultative platforms but also by recognising NGOs as legitimate partners in community development. Mechanisms such as the Government-Organised Non-Governmental Organisation (GONGON) initiative should be revitalised to ensure inclusive policy design and responsiveness to community needs.

### **2. Improve Rural Infrastructure for Effective Outreach**

Government should accelerate the implementation of programmes like the Rural Access and Agricultural

Marketing Programme (RAAMP) to expand feeder roads, thereby improving mobility and reducing the isolation of rural communities. This will enhance NGOs' access to underserved populations and facilitate the distribution of essential services.

### **3. Leverage Technology for Connectivity**

Collaboration between government and telecommunication providers should be encouraged to extend communication infrastructure such as community-based mini-dishes and rural network towers to hinterland areas. Improved digital connectivity will enable NGOs to coordinate programmes more efficiently, engage beneficiaries, and build inclusive digital economies in rural communities.

### **4. Address Insecurity to Safeguard Development Interventions**

A secure environment is a prerequisite for effective NGO operations. Government should prioritise community-based security strategies and strengthen local policing mechanisms to guarantee safe access for NGOs and prevent the disruption of rural livelihoods by armed groups.

### **5. Promote Accountability and Sustainability of NGO Interventions**

NGOs should adopt transparent monitoring and evaluation systems

to enhance credibility and ensure that interventions are sustained beyond donor cycles. This will help build community trust, reduce dependency, and strengthen the long-term impact of poverty alleviation initiatives.

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