The Role of Christian Youths in Societal Transformation: A Case Study of Khana Local Government Area

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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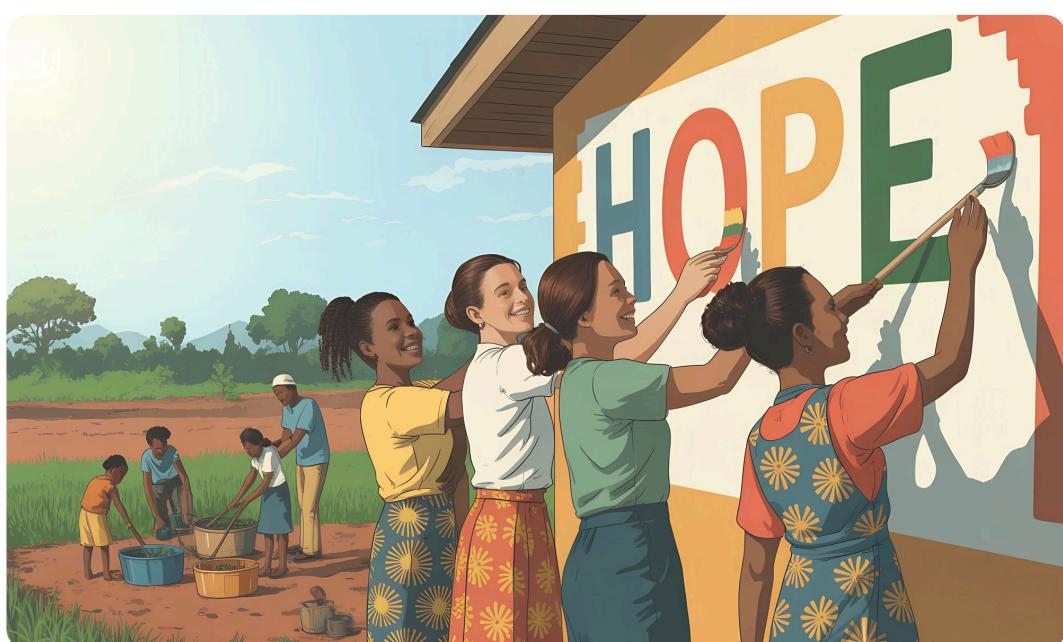
ABSTRACT

Societal transformation entails the visible changes and development experienced by society in terms of economic, socio-political, moral, and environmental progress. This paper explores the pivotal role of Christian youths in driving societal transformation within the Khana Local Government Area of Nigeria– an area predominantly inhabited by the Christian Ogoni people, yet marked by diverse ethnic and religious dynamics. Despite significant challenges posed by environmental degradation due to oil pollution, which intensifies poverty and disrupts communal cohesion, Christian youths actively engage in community development, social justice, and moral advocacy initiatives. Previous research lacks a primary focus on the societal transformation of Ogoniland, especially regarding the role of Christian youths in the population under study. To address this critical gap, this study examines how these youth-led initiatives function as catalysts for social change, what motivates such involvement, and the strategies that can enhance their impact in a pluralistic and volatile socio-political environment. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research administered structured questionnaires to 300 Christian youths (aged 21-41) in the Khana Local Government Area, 250 of which were used for analysis and discussion. The analysis reveals that 75% of respondents are involved in community development programmes, 60% participate in advocacy, and 55% engage in evangelism, motivated by faith, compassion, and a drive for positive transformation. The findings underscore the significance of strategic partnerships and collaborative efforts that strengthen the effectiveness of these grassroots movements, while also acknowledging challenges such as resource limitations and socio-political instability. Grounded in social transformation theory, the study highlights the need for youth empowerment, interfaith dialogue, and leadership development. It advocates scaling up proven initiatives to amplify their societal influence. Ultimately, this research contributes to broader conversations on social change by demonstrating how the localised actions of Christian youths foster resilience and drive reform within Nigeria's complex social fabric.

Methodology

Mixed-methods approach using structured questionnaires administered to 300 Christian youths (aged 21-41).

Key Finding

75% involved in community development programmes, 60% in advocacy, and 55% in evangelism.

Core Focus

How Christian youth-led initiatives catalyse social change in challenging environments.

Keywords: Khana LGA, Christian youths, societal development, transformation, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Societal transformation refers to visible positive changes in socio-economic policies, political systems, and other tangible shifts over time (Khondker & Schuerkens, 2014). Christian youths play a vital role, contributing to community development, social justice, conflict resolution, and the promotion of moral values (Msebi, 2022).

Khana Local Government Area (LGA) (See Figure 1), with its diverse ethnic and religious composition, provides a crucial context for exploring Christian youths' role in societal transformation. The region's unique challenges, particularly environmental degradation from oil pollution, create both obstacles and opportunities for youth-led initiatives (United Nations Environment Programme, 2011). Research indicates that religious organisations, especially Christian institutions, serve as significant platforms for community mobilisation and development in Nigeria (Ukommi et al., 2020).
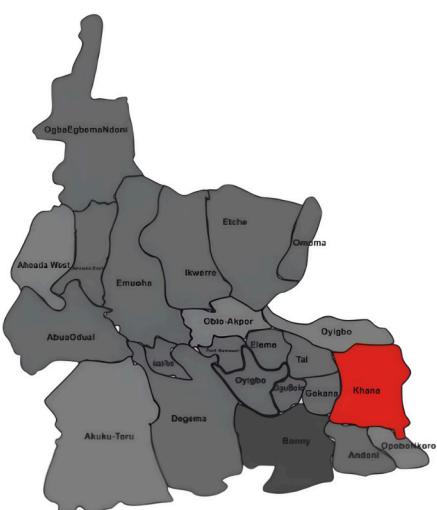

Figure 1: A Map showing Khana Local Government

Source: Obe, 2025

The precise origin of the Ogoni people is debated; some studies suggest migration from across the Imo River, while others propose arrival by boat from Ghana, settling in the southern part (Saale, 2015, p. 110). Proponents of the latter theory cite the self-designation "Khana" as an indicator of Ghanaian origin. Ogoniland, measuring about 400 square miles (100,000 sq. km), is located east of Port Harcourt in Rivers State. With approximately 500,000 inhabitants and a 1993 population density of 1,250 persons per square mile (nearly five times the Nigerian average), the Ogoni people are Nigeria's smallest yet most densely concentrated ethnic group.

01

Historical Origins

Ogoni people migrated from Ghana or across the Imo River, settling in the southern Niger Delta (Saale, 2015).

02

Geographical Context

400 sq. miles east of Port Harcourt, with a population density five times Nigeria's average.

03

Political Structure

Comprises six kingdoms: Babbe, Eleme, Gokana, Ken-Khana, Nyo-Khana, and Tai, each with distinct languages.

Politically, Ogoniland consists of six kingdoms: Babbe, Eleme, Gokana, Ken-Khana, Nyo-Khana, and Tai. Within Ogoniland, four main languages are spoken, which, although related, are mutually unintelligible. Linguistic experts classify the Ogoni languages of Khana, Gokana, and Eleme as a distinct group within the Benue-Congo branch of African languages, or more particularly, as a branch in the New Benue-Congo family (Blench, 2008). Despite the introduction of Christianity, many aspects of indigenous Ogoni culture and religion remain evident.

The Ogoni occupy an alluvial plain bounded on the north by the Imo River and their Igbo neighbours; on the south by the littoral flats inhabited by the Obolo (Andoni); on the east by the Opobo River and the Ibibio; and on the west by the Ikwerre, which stretches into the large city of Port Harcourt, Rivers State. The land and rivers surrounding Ogoniland are of central importance to the Ogoni people. They not only provide sufficient food but are also believed to embody spiritual significance, with rivers worshipped as deities. This explains why the Ogoni people face immense difficulties with environmental degradation as a result of oil pollution.

Ogoniland is primarily an agricultural and fishing society, living in close-knit rural communities in one of the most densely populated areas of Africa. The people established an organised social system operating under a monarchy, under which men and women of courage and ability enjoyed special status. The fruits of the land, especially yams, are honoured in festivals. The annual festival of the Ogoni people coincides with the yam harvest. The planting season is not merely agricultural but also a spiritual, religious, and social occasion. In the Khana tongue, *doonu kuneke* (tradition) means the honouring of the land (UNEP, 2011; Mai-Bornu, 2020; ecoi.net, 2007).

The Ogoni people believe that the soul of every human being has the ability to leave its human form and enter that of an animal, taking on the shape of that animal. Such beliefs underscore the deep connection between the Ogoni and nature (United Nations Environment Programme, 2011). Due to their agricultural economy and increasing population, most of the rainforest that once covered the area has been cleared for farming. The region forms part of the coastal plains, featuring terraces with gentle slopes intersected by deep valleys carrying water intermittently.

Khana Local Government Area of Nigeria, predominantly inhabited by the Ogoni people, represents a unique case study for examining youth-led transformation initiatives within environmentally challenged communities. The area has experienced significant ecological degradation due to decades of oil exploration and extraction activities, which have fundamentally altered the socio-economic landscape and created both challenges and opportunities for community development (Nkem et al., 2024). Research indicates that environmental degradation in oil-producing communities often catalyses the emergence of grassroots movements and youth-led initiatives aimed at community resilience and restoration (Popoola et al., 2024). The intersection of environmental challenges and religious faith has created a distinctive context where Christian youths draw upon both spiritual motivation and practical necessity to drive transformation efforts in their communities.

Research Objectives

- Investigate historical and contemporary youth roles in socio-political transformation across Western and African societies.
- Analyse the motivational role of Christian faith in youth involvement in community development within Khana Local Government Area (LGA).
- Evaluate the tangible impact of Christian youth-led initiatives on education, healthcare, and social cohesion.
- Identify key economic, political, and socio-cultural challenges impeding Christian youth participation in community transformation in Khana LGA.
- Compare Western and African (Nigerian focus) youth transformation models for relevant empowerment lessons.
- Examine how partnerships with external stakeholders (churches, NGOs, government agencies) influence the success of youth development initiatives.

Research Questions

1. What roles have youths historically assumed in driving societal transformation in Western and African contexts?
2. In what ways does Christian faith motivation influence youth engagement in community development activities within Khana LGA?
3. What are the perceived and measurable impacts of youth-led initiatives on education, health, and social cohesion in Khana LGA communities?
4. What barriers–such as economic hardship, political marginalisation, or socio-cultural constraints–limit the effectiveness of Christian youth-led transformation projects?
5. How does collaboration with churches, NGOs, and governmental bodies affect the outcomes of youth-driven development initiatives?
6. What strategies can be employed to empower marginalised or underrepresented communities in advancing youth-led societal transformation?

Key Contributions

Highlights Christian youths as active agents through community development, social justice advocacy, and moral value promotion.

Contextual Insight

Emphasises unique historical, ethnic, and religious dynamics of the Ogoni people shaping youth initiatives.

Empirical Evidence

Presents data on youth engagement, providing a basis for policy recommendations and understanding social change.

This paper makes six major contributions: (i) it highlights Christian youths' crucial role in societal transformation through community development, social justice advocacy, and moral value promotion (Akinsola, 2025); (ii) it emphasises the unique historical, ethnic, and religious dynamics of the Ogoni people in shaping Christian youth initiatives and their societal impacts (Hanachor & Echezu, 2021); (iii) it offers insight into how individual actions drive broader societal change, distinguishing individual and systemic transformations (Salman & Hamet, 2024); (iv) it presents empirical data on youth engagement, providing a basis for policy recommendations and enhancing understanding of youth involvement in social change (Etukudo et al., 2024); (v) it identifies effective models of collaboration among Christian youths, local organisations, churches, and NGOs, showcasing the importance of partnerships for successful community-driven initiatives (Nwokoro, 2017); and (vi) it outlines obstacles, such as limited resources and political tensions, that hinder youth-led initiatives, contributing to a better understanding of systemic barriers in similar socio-political environments (Osazuwa & Audu, 2024).

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: Section II reviews related literature; Section III presents the research methodology; Section IV highlights recommendations; and Section V summarises the paper.

RELATED WORKS

This section reviews works related to the problem under study.

The Concept of Societal Transformation

"Social transformation is the process by which an individual alters the socially ascribed social status of their parents into a socially achieved status for themselves." This refers to changing a family's or society's social structure. Youths typically drive this. Another definition refers to large-scale social change, such as cultural reforms. The first is individual, the second systemic.

Individually, this differs from social reproduction and mobility by focusing on how an individual alters their aligned class culture, rather than intergenerational status changes. Individual transformation occurs in three steps: associational embracement, associational distancing, and distinct self-presentation. It is an interpersonal negotiation, requiring others to validate the individual's social position for transformation–a "reciprocal relationship" where people must be "embraced and correctly identified with the cultural expectations of their particular class membership."

Systemically, social transformation requires a shift in society's collective consciousness–local, state, national, or global–to redefine reality by consensus. This often happens due to external stimuli and sometimes intentionally. Scientific discoveries, religious edicts, and royal decrees have historically triggered many such transformations.

Some countries have achieved these intentional social transformations–one such example being South Africa in 1994 when it ended apartheid (Brittian & Lewin, 2013). Social transformations are considered to have occurred when they are sustained over time, with attitudes and values being held in a completely new context (or paradigm) based upon different assumptions and beliefs. Social transformation implies a fundamental change in society, which can be contrasted with social change, viewed as gradual or incremental changes over a period of time (Khondker & Schuerkens, 2014).

Social change has been the subject of extensive sociological inquiry, with scholars examining how religious organisations, particularly in developing contexts, serve as catalysts for community transformation (Ukommi et al., 2020). In Nigeria specifically, faith-based organisations have demonstrated significant capacity to mobilise communities for development initiatives, leveraging their embedded social networks and moral authority to drive sustainable change (Popoola et al., 2024).

Although the idea of social change is more or less universal, there are sometimes disagreements regarding the directionality of change as well as its mechanisms. In the Judeo-Christian-Islamic (sometimes referred to as the "Western") discourse emanating from the ancient Egyptian and Greek civilisations, time was perceived as an arrow, moving forward in a linear trajectory. Following these positions, the concept of youth-led change experienced in the area under study is progressive and follows a chronological trajectory. These cosmological differences account for the cultural variations in the perceptions of social transformation in Khana LGA.

Transformation of Social Structure

Change can be found and analysed in rather limited groups, in processes of transformation that are of varying lengths and character, and, if the factor of time is considered, as short- or long-term change or as continuous or non-continuous change. The sociological explanation of change is related to the structure that changes and to the elements that cause this change. The analysis of social change tries to show the conditions and factors that cause the movement of a society from one particular situation to another (Schuerkens, 2003).

Individual Transformation	Systemic Transformation	Sustained Change
The process by which individuals alter socially ascribed status through associational embracement, distancing, and distinct self-presentation.	A shift in collective consciousness requiring consensus, often triggered by an external stimulus or intentional action.	Transformation that endures over time, with attitudes and values held within a completely new paradigm based on different assumptions.

Analysing transformations presents two key problems: establishing the origins of change and characterising the initial and final states of these processes. Sociologists must consider all aspects of a social system's structure, the mechanisms for action selection, and potential resulting actions. Social processes are explained and characterised by isolating significant structural elements and analysing their relations. Demonstrating a specific moment in a transformation process involves linking several elements and their mutual relations. Changes in a given structure, or the appearance of distinct structures, mark different periods of social history. Without the concept of structure, social processes and their historical development cannot be understood.

Youths in the Western World and Social Transformation

Human history showcases numerous young people who have driven socio-political, economic, and scientific transformations. Youth have left indelible marks across science, religion, commerce, arts, and politics (Arnett, 2015). Contemporary research underscores young people as active agents of change, rather than passive recipients of development interventions (Wagstaff & Parker, 2020).

Historical figures exemplify this (see Figure 2): Alexander the Great began his empire's expansion at 18; Augustus Caesar became a Roman senator at 20, later becoming the first Emperor of Rome. Joan of Arc, at 17, shifted the Hundred Years' War in France's favour in 1429. Christopher Columbus discovered the Americas at 41 in 1492. Vasco da Gama, at 38, discovered the sea route linking Europe to Asia in 1498, connecting the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, and thus the West and the Orient.
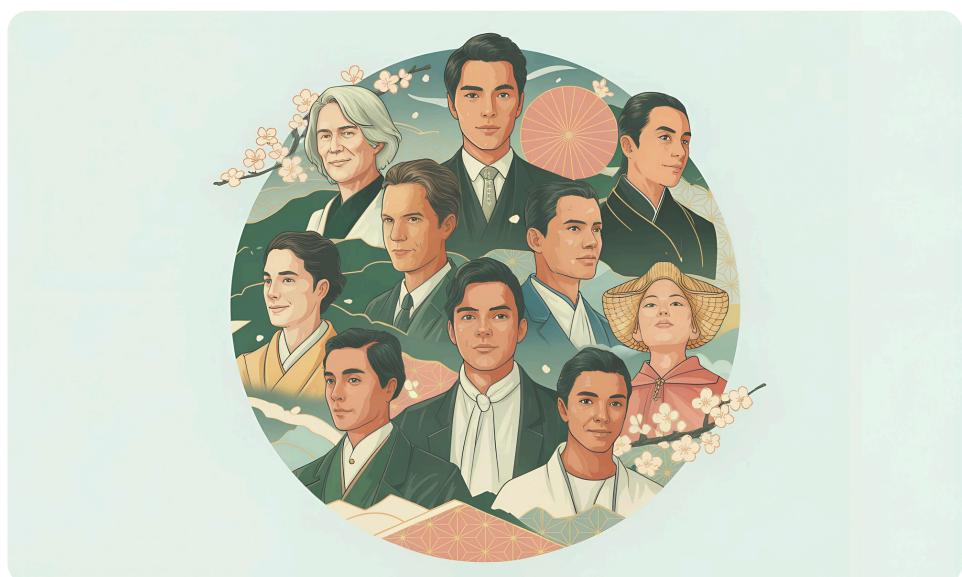
Figure 2: Historical young leaders who drove social transformation

William Pitt the Younger became Prime Minister of England at 24 in 1783. The young Marquis de Lafayette (Gilbert du Motier) helped turn the tide of the American Revolutionary War for the colonists, contributing to their victory and the independence of the United States. He also convinced King Louis XVI to support the American rebels. Thomas Jefferson, author of the American Declaration of Independence, was 33 when he wrote it in 1776. The Wright brothers, in their 30s, invented the aeroplane. Martin Luther King Jr., as a youth, amplified the civil rights movement with his voice against racial segregation, redefining racial equality in the United States.

Neil Alden Armstrong was 38 when he became the first human to walk on the moon on 20 July 1969. Mark Zuckerberg, in his 20s, created Facebook, connecting the world. Sergey Brin and Larry Page were in their twenties when they founded Google in 1998. These examples demonstrate the great potential in every youth, including those on Nigerian streets. Given proper platforms and motivation, Nigerian youths can achieve amazing things, enabling the country to compete globally.

The French Revolution (1789-1799), a remarkable political event, was inspired and executed by young people. Key figures included Jean-Baptiste Bernadotte (26), Napoleon Bonaparte (20), Jean Pierre-André Amar (33), Joseph Bonaparte (21), and Louis Alexandre Berthier (36), alongside others like French fruit seller Reine Audu. These youths collectively championed liberty and equality for humanity.

This revolution inspired many other movements for freedom and equality globally, including the American Revolutionary War. The American Declaration of Independence notably asserts, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." The French Revolution also led to the dissolution of absolute monarchy in many countries, especially in Europe, forming the basis for republican government. Africa also saw remarkable young leaders such as Amílcar Cabral (Guinea-Bissau), Steve Biko (South Africa), Patrice Lumumba (Congo), and Thomas Sankara (Burkina Faso). In Nigeria, youths spearheaded the struggle for political independence.

In Western contexts, youth movements have historically driven social transformation, from civil rights to environmental activism. This pattern offers insights into similar dynamics in developing contexts, where young people face distinct challenges in asserting their agency and contributing to societal development (Brittian & Lewin, 2013). The experiences of Western youth highlight the universal capacity of young people to act as catalysts for positive change when provided with platforms and support.

Youths in Nigerian/African Culture and Social Transformation

Conceptualising, defining, and representing youth and their worlds has become an important focus for scholars seeking to examine how research itself has constructed youth as distinct social groups that are often presented as disruptive to an otherwise coherent social order and social institutions. Studies that have looked at youth in Africa as delinquent, misguided, causing social crises, being coerced into mischief, or as subjects rather than agents of their own lives have provided interesting insights into perceptions and constructions of youth.

Similarly, studies by scholars who insist that youth in Africa be regarded through theoretical and empirical lenses that go beyond these stereotypical notions of rebellion and vulnerability have shown how recent advances in technology, the intensification of global processes, and the continued weakening of the nation-state are contributing to new and complex ways of understanding what it means to be youth in Africa today (Arnett, 2015; Wagstaff & Parker, 2020).

Indeed, questions of what constitutes youthhood and the degree to which the lives of youth can be deeply understood have been central to contemporary African development discourse. Recent research emphasises that African youth are not merely passive recipients of development interventions but active agents of social transformation, asserting their agency in various contexts including community development and environmental restoration efforts (Nkem et al., 2024; see Figure 3).

From a demographic perspective, Africa is a young continent, with up to forty per cent of its population aged between fifteen and twenty-four, and more than two-thirds below thirty years (White & Wyn, 2004). This conspicuous size of the youth has contributed to the complex and at times precarious place they occupy in Africa today and hence demands a deeper approach to research and analysis capable of capturing this complexity of youth identity, lives, ambitions, and the critical role they play in transforming their societies.

Figure 3: Young African Christian leaders engaged in community development activities

Classical sociological views, which promote a "youth as a problem" approach by seeing practices like combat participation or delayed marriage as chaotic and deviant (Shoemaker, 2010), are insufficient for understanding the complexity of African youth today. While these perceptions align with traditional African gerontocracy, where power is held by elders, the significant youth demographics and their desire for broad social changes can no longer be overlooked.

A growing body of scholarship highlights youth as active agents shaping society through "culture-making," a creative and complex process of social reproduction. They achieve this by inventing new forms of language, contributing to economies via popular culture, reconstituting political movements through armed rebellion or non-violent demonstrations, and reshaping public discourse via social media and expressive culture. Through activism driven by increased interconnectedness through social media and technology, Nigerian youths, like peers across Africa, are addressing realities of low wages, high unemployment, and poor governance, all linked to economic issues.

METHODOLOGY

This section describes the study's methodology, including tools, data analysis techniques, population size, hypotheses, and sampling methods.

Research Design

A mixed-methods (quantitative and qualitative) research design was employed to assess respondents' opinions on the role of Christian youths in societal transformation, focusing on Khana Local Government Area.

Population of Study

The Ogoni people, predominantly Christian (96% Christian, rest traditional worshippers), number approximately 478,000. They are primarily located in Rivers State, Nigeria, specifically in the Khana Local Government Area.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

A stratified sampling technique was adopted to generate data using structured questionnaires. The study's sample comprised 300 Christian youths (ages 21-41) from Khana Local Government Area, with 250 used for analysis.

Method of Data Analysis

The survey data were analysed using descriptive statistics, thematic analysis, content analysis, simple percentages, and chi-square (χ^2). This mixed-methods approach aligns with contemporary research practices in community development studies, particularly those examining faith-based youth initiatives in Nigeria (Etukudo et al., 2024).

Research Design

Mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative analysis of Christian youth opinions, following established frameworks for studying religious organisations' community development roles (Nwokoro, 2017).

Population

96% Christian Ogoni population (~478,000) in Rivers State, focusing on Khana LGA. This demographic concentration provides a unique context for examining faith-based community transformation initiatives (Hanachor & Echezu, 2021).

Sample

Stratified random sampling was employed to ensure representative participation across different youth groups and community sectors, consistent with best practices in youth development research (Etukudo et al., 2024).

Hypotheses Formulation

Hypothesis 1: Motivation and involvement

- Null hypothesis (Ho_1): There is no significant correlation between the faith motivation of Christian youths in Khana LGA and their engagement in community development initiatives for positive societal change when compared with external incentives.
- Alternative hypothesis (H_{a1}): There is a significant correlation between the faith motivation of Christian youths in Khana LGA and their engagement in community development initiatives for positive societal change when compared with external incentives.

Hypothesis 2: Impact of initiatives

- Null hypothesis (Ho_2): There is no significant difference in improved access to education, health outcomes, and social cohesion in Khana LGA between communities with youth-led social initiatives (e.g., education programmes, healthcare projects) and those without such initiatives.
- Alternative hypothesis (H_{a2}): There is a significant difference in improved access to education, health outcomes, and social cohesion in Khana LGA between communities with youth-led social initiatives (e.g., education programmes, healthcare projects) and those without such initiatives.

Hypothesis 3: Collaboration and effectiveness

- Null hypothesis (Ho$_3$): There is no significant difference in the achievement of greater measurable impact in community projects between Christian youths who collaborate with local organisations, churches, or NGOs and those who do not.
- Alternative hypothesis (H$_{a3}$): There is a significant difference in the achievement of greater measurable impact in community projects between Christian youths who collaborate with local organisations, churches, or NGOs and those who do not.

Hypothesis 4: Challenges and barriers

- Null hypothesis (Ho$_4$): Limited resources, political instability, and interethnic tensions do not significantly reduce the effectiveness of Christian youth-led initiatives in Khana LGA.
- Alternative hypothesis (H$_{a4}$): Limited resources, political instability, and interethnic tensions significantly reduce the effectiveness of Christian youth-led initiatives in Khana LGA.

Test Statistics

The test statistic is the chi-square (χ^2). Each χ^2 value indicates the extent of association, and the p-values are used to determine statistical significance. The conclusion on whether to reject or not reject each null hypothesis was based on the p-value (typically with a significance level of 0.05).

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This section presents the results and discusses the main findings of the study.

Demographic Analysis and Results
Gender Representation

The pie chart in Figure 4 shows a heavy tilt towards male respondents. This indicates that male Christian youths in Khana are actively participating in societal issues (80.3%) and are better represented in transformation initiatives compared with their female counterparts (19.7%). This implies a lack of alignment with inclusive community development, where both genders can contribute ideas, efforts, and leadership.
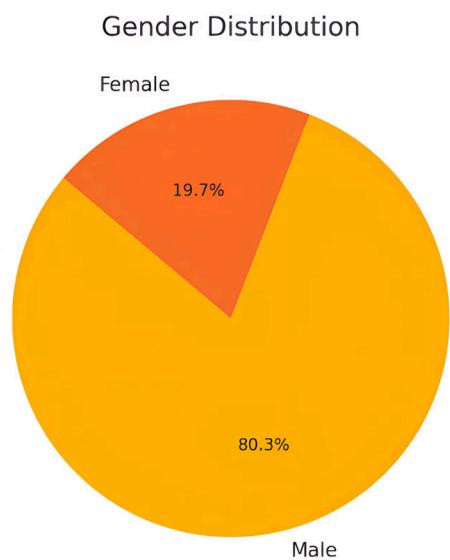
Figure 4: Gender Distribution of Respondents

Age Distribution

Figure 5 shows that the respondents fall within the 31-40 age bracket (specifically ranges such as 31-35 and 36-40), with fewer in the younger (18-25) or older ranges (above 41). This suggests that Christian youths are predominantly in their prime productive years, aligning with research that identifies this age group as particularly active in community development initiatives (Popoola et al., 2024).
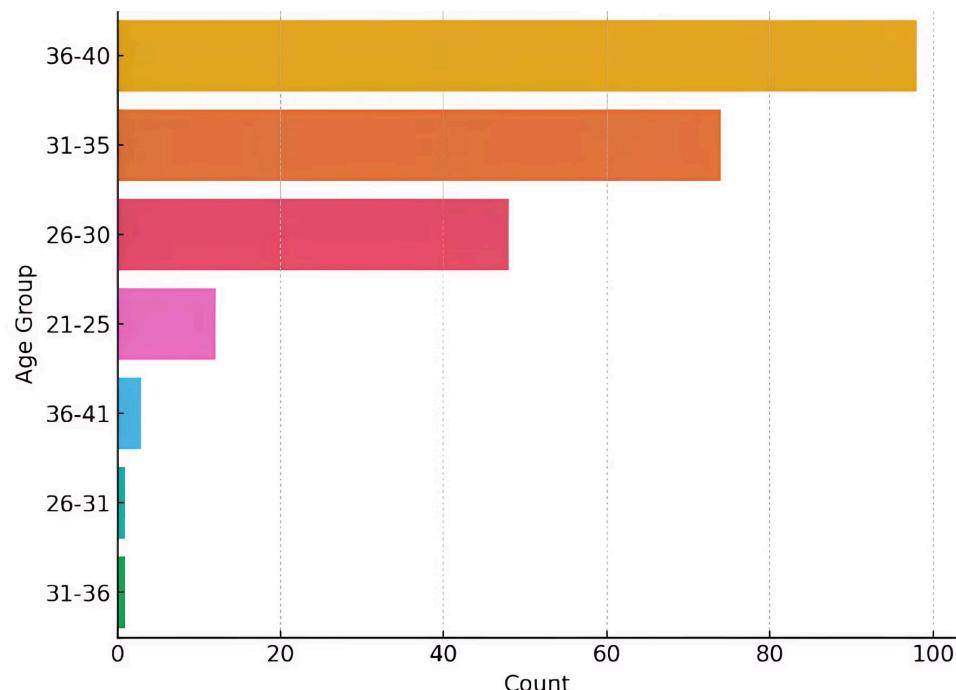

Figure 5: Age Distribution of Respondents

Educational Background

The histogram in Figure 6 shows that the majority of respondents are either graduates or postgraduates. However, it remains important to recognise and include the unique perspectives and experiences of all young people in efforts to address societal challenges and foster sustainable development (Wagstaff & Parker, 2020). Research indicates that higher educational attainment among youth is positively correlated with increased civic engagement and community development participation, particularly in faith-based contexts where education is often viewed as a tool for service to others (Msebi, 2022). The educational profile of the respondents reflects broader trends in Christian communities where emphasis on education is seen as both a personal development goal and a means of contributing to community transformation (Ukommi et al., 2020). This implies a strong capacity for evidence-based transformation efforts, such as awareness campaigns, advocacy for policy changes, and community action programmes.
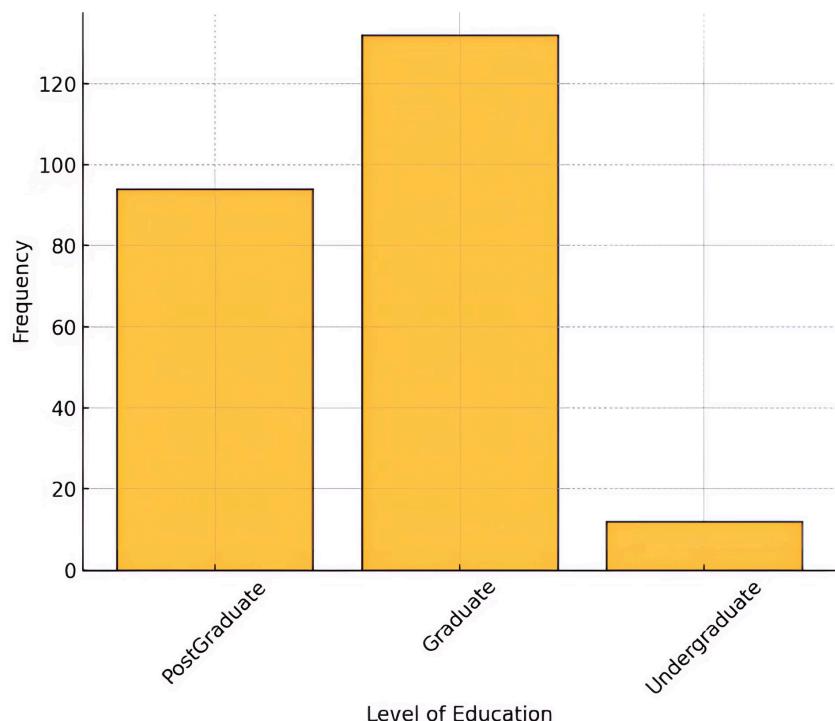

Figure 6: Level of Education

Community Representation

Table 1 presents the demographic distribution and participation rates of community members across different wards in Khana LGA. It highlights broad-based participation with a focus on youth (ages 18-40), reflecting the study's emphasis on Christian youth involvement in societal transformation. Communities like Wiiyaakara (12.8%), Korokoro Lueku (12.0%), Nyogor Lueku (9.6%), and Baen (9.6%) show the strongest Christian youth involvement, likely due to strong church structures, active youth fellowships, and cultural volunteering initiatives. These are strategic hubs for launching or scaling transformation initiatives.

Communities such as Kpean, Okwale, Guh Lueku, and Gure contribute 7-8%, indicating solid but improvable levels of participation. Agbani Lueku, Rumuewhor Odegu, Kporghor Tai, Kereken Boue, and Omuihuechi Aluu each have 4.8% representation. These lower figures suggest geographically isolated or under-reached areas, limited youth access to church-driven initiatives, or gaps in awareness/coordination of transformation efforts. While some may have adequate structures, all require strengthened mobilisation, potentially through local leaders or church partnerships.

This data reflects the participation, readiness, and reach of Christian youth in Khana LGA to act as agents of transformation. Communities with a strong youth presence should be empowered as catalysts, while others need mobilisation and mentorship to ensure no area is left behind in the transformative agenda.

Table 1: Community Participation in Research

Community	Frequency	Percentage
Wiiyaakara	32	12.8%
Korokoro Lueku	30	12.0%
Nyogor Lueku	24	9.6%
Baen	24	9.6%
KPEAN	20	8.0%
Okwale	20	8.0%
Others	100	40.0%
Total	**250**	**100%**

Kpean, Okwale, and other communities contribute between 7% and 8%, reflecting solid but improvable levels of participation. These may represent geographically isolated or under-reached areas, youths with limited access to church-driven initiatives, and gaps in awareness or co-ordination of transformation efforts. These communities may have adequate structures but might require strengthened mobilisation, possibly through local leaders or church partnerships.

Test of Hypotheses

Table 2 shows the hypothesis test results. Chi-square (χ^2) tests were employed to determine significance, with a threshold of $p < .05$. All four tests yielded p-values below 0.05, leading to the rejection of all four null hypotheses.

Hypothesis	χ^2 Statistic	p-value	Result (0.05)	Decision
Hypothesis 1	14.76	0.0001	Reject H_0	Significant
Hypothesis 2	21.36	0.0000	Reject H_0	Significant
Hypothesis 3	8.53	0.0035	Reject H_0	Significant
Hypothesis 4	15.93	0.0001	Reject H_0	Significant

This statistically supports the following conclusions:

1. Faith motivation significantly influences youth involvement (H1) (Msebi, 2022).
2. Youth-led initiatives positively impact social outcomes in Khana LGA (H2) (Popoola et al., 2024).
3. Collaboration with local organisations enhances project success (H3) (Ukommi et al., 2020).
4. Barriers such as limited resources or tensions significantly affect initiative effectiveness (H4) (Nkem et al., 2024).

Each hypothesis reveals critical drivers and obstacles shaping the effectiveness of youth-led societal transformation. The statistical significance of these relationships aligns with broader research on youth agency in development contexts, which emphasises the importance of both individual motivation and structural support systems in facilitating successful community development initiatives (Wagstaff & Parker, 2020). These findings contribute to the growing body of evidence demonstrating that faith-based youth movements can serve as effective platforms for social transformation when supported by appropriate institutional frameworks and community partnerships (Brittian & Lewin, 2013).

75%

Community Development

Respondents involved in community development programmes.

60%

Advocacy

Participation in social advocacy initiatives.

55%

Evangelism

Engagement in evangelistic activities.

- **Hypothesis 1 (χ^2 = 14.76, p = .0001 → Reject H_0):** There is a significant correlation between faith motivation and youth involvement. This implies that Christian youths in Khana LGA are primarily driven by faith-based values such as service, compassion, and stewardship, rather than external incentives like monetary rewards or recognition. Faith emerges as a strong internal motivator for youth activism and community development.

- **Hypothesis 2 (χ^2 = 21.36, p < .0001 → Reject H_0):** Youth-led initiatives have a measurable impact on community outcomes. Communities in Khana LGA where Christian youths lead or participate in education, healthcare, or social programmes experience improved outcomes such as better access to education, improved health practices, stronger communal ties, and increased social trust.

- **Hypothesis 3 (χ^2 = 8.53, p = .0035 → Reject H_0):** Collaboration significantly enhances project success. Christian youths who collaborate with churches, NGOs, or community-based organisations achieve greater measurable impact than those working in isolation. This highlights the importance of partnerships, mentorship, and institutional support.

- **Hypothesis 4 (χ^2 = 15.93, p = .0001 → Reject H_0):** Barriers such as limited resources, political instability, and inter-ethnic tensions significantly reduce initiative effectiveness. This reality calls for structural interventions such as funding, logistical support, and training; peacebuilding and inter-community engagement programmes; and youth-led advocacy aimed at holding government and religious institutions accountable for systemic reforms.

INTERPRETATION AND THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Christian Youths as Active Contributors to Transformation

Rather than being disengaged or apathetic, the youth population–especially those within faith communities–is deeply involved in societal development efforts. They design, lead, and implement initiatives that address core community concerns, such as organising tutorials, school advocacy campaigns, and literacy drives; facilitating health awareness sessions and collaborating on vaccination or hygiene programmes; encouraging peaceful coexistence; and promoting voter education and anti-drug campaigns.

Faith, Collaboration, and Activism as Levers of Change

The study highlights three interconnected levers that define the unique contribution of Christian youths. First, they are moved by spiritual convictions such as love for neighbour, stewardship, and justice to pursue social good. Faith acts as an intrinsic driver of accountability, compassion, and resilience. Second, youths who work in tandem with churches, NGOs, and other stakeholders produce more impactful results. This collaborative ethos fosters shared responsibility, resource pooling, and learning, which enhances the quality and scale of youth-led programmes. Finally, the active push by Christian youths to address injustice, neglect, or inequality shows a commendable level of civic consciousness.

Barriers Are Not Just Limitations: They Are Points of Strategic Intervention

The results further underscore that challenges such as inadequate funding, ethnic divisions, and political instability not only slow down progress but also create inequities in access, participation, and outcomes (Nkem et al., 2024). For instance, limited resources mean that even the most passionate youths may lack transportation, tools, or venues to conduct their programmes; inter-ethnic tensions can lead to mistrust, division, and exclusion in youth initiatives; and political apathy or manipulation may discourage or even endanger youth activists.

However, research suggests that these barriers can be transformed into strategic intervention points when approached systematically (Wagstaff & Parker, 2020). Environmental challenges, in particular, have been shown to catalyse innovative community responses and strengthen social cohesion when communities are supported with appropriate resources and capacity-building initiatives (United Nations Environment Programme, 2011). The experience of Christian youth organisations in similar contexts demonstrates that faith-based approaches can provide both the motivation and the organisational framework necessary to overcome structural barriers and achieve sustainable community development outcomes (Ukommi et al., 2020).

Strategic Partnerships Amplify Youth Impact

Perhaps the most transformative implication is the value of inter-organisational collaboration. When churches, NGOs, and government agencies support youth-led initiatives, they not only increase visibility but also scale results. Such partnerships can institutionalise youth development programmes, embed youth leaders into local decision-making processes, and integrate faith-based solutions into broader development frameworks. This suggests that any sustainable societal transformation agenda in Khana LGA must include Christian youths as partners, not afterthoughts.

Strategic Investment Priorities for Sustainable Development in Khana LGA

The findings of this research indicate that Khana Local Government Area is at a critical developmental crossroads, where intentional and well-targeted investments are not only urgent but essential for reversing patterns of neglect and fostering sustainable growth. Five strategic areas of investment emerge as particularly pressing:

1 Youth Development and Skill Acquisition Initiatives

Investments are needed in structured youth empowerment schemes, particularly in technical and vocational education such as welding, ICT, agriculture, fashion design, and renewable energy, to reduce dependency and promote entrepreneurship.

2 Educational Infrastructure and Capacity Enhancement

Targeted investments are required for rehabilitating schools, furnishing classrooms with modern equipment, and implementing continuous teacher development programmes to enhance the quality of education.

3 Community-Based Primary Healthcare Delivery

Strengthening the local health system involves refurbishment of primary health centres, provision of essential drugs, deployment of trained medical personnel, and the implementation of mobile clinic programmes.

4 Agricultural Support and Rural Livelihoods

Strategic investments should focus on mechanised farming, storage facilities, agricultural co-operatives, rural feeder roads, and empowering smallholder farmers through access to credit and training.

5 Civic Education and Participatory Governance

Investments in civic education programmes are essential for promoting awareness of rights and responsibilities, as well as establishing youth forums and community development associations for transparency and inclusive decision-making.

These five investment priorities represent a roadmap for addressing both the structural and socio-economic challenges confronting Khana LGA. By aligning resources with these strategic areas, policy-makers, development agencies, and faith-based organisations can catalyse meaningful change and set the foundation for long-term transformation in the region.

RECOMMENDATIONS

01

National Orientation Agency Collaboration

The National Orientation Agency (NOA), in collaboration with the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), is encouraged to lead value reorientation campaigns among Christian youths. Leveraging church networks for civic education can foster responsible citizenship, ethical leadership, and a renewed sense of national identity rooted in faith and service.

02

Niger Delta Development Commission Support

The Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) should prioritise funding and technical support for youth-led community transformation initiatives in the Ogoni region. Partnering with NGOs and church-based youth organisations will ensure grassroots relevance and enhance the sustainability of such development projects.

03

UNFPA Faith-Based Programming

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), in collaboration with ecumenical youth bodies such as the World Council of Churches, is encouraged to incorporate faith-based strategies into youth development programming. This will provide spiritual, moral, and psychological support alongside skill development and social inclusion.

04

Federal Ministry Policy Integration

The Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development is urged to adopt the study's findings in shaping inclusive youth policies. Special emphasis should be placed on recognising the contributions of faith-motivated youth actors in driving community development and national transformation in Khana LGA.

05

Civil Society Engagement Extension

Organisations such as YIAGA Africa and Connected Development (CODE) are encouraged to extend their civic engagement and accountability initiatives to rural, faith-based communities. Strengthening such partnerships will enhance transparency, foster active citizenship, and amplify the voices of youths at the grassroots.

06

International Christian Support

Ecumenical youth networks and international Christian organisations should support local faith-based youth movements through exchange programmes, theological training, and development workshops. These collaborations will enrich youth perspectives and promote globally informed, contextually grounded approaches to transformation.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study decisively demonstrate that Christian youths in Khana Local Government Area (LGA) are not merely passive observers of societal challenges, but are active change agents with the capacity and determination to influence their communities in meaningful ways. The statistically significant associations revealed through the hypothesis tests provide robust evidence for this conclusion. As shown in the results of the data analysis, the study affirms that Christian youths in Khana LGA possess the motivation (faith-driven), the capacity (education, leadership, creativity), the experience (active initiatives), and the collaborative potential (networking with stakeholders) to drive long-term transformation in their communities. Recognising and reinforcing their efforts could unlock exponential benefits for Khana LGA and serve as a model for similar regions across Nigeria.

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