

**ASSESSING THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF UNITED METHODIST
CHURCH'S FOOD STORAGE INITIATIVE ON LOCAL ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT IN MUMUYE LAND, ZING LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA,
TARABA STATE, NIGERIA**

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Abstract

This study assesses the socio-economic impact of the United Methodist Church's food storage initiative on local economic development in Mumuye land, Zing Local Government Area, Taraba State, Nigeria. Employing a qualitative research approach, the study gathered data through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, observations, and document analysis. The findings indicate that the initiative has had a positive impact on the community, increasing food availability and accessibility, improving income for farmers and local businesses, strengthening social capital and community relationships, and improving health and well-being. The study's findings have significant implications for policy, practice, and future research, highlighting the importance of initiatives that address food insecurity and promote economic development. The study recommends scaling up the initiative, providing additional support to farmers and local businesses, fostering community participation, and conducting regular monitoring and evaluation. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on food security and economic development, providing insights into the impact of food storage initiatives on local economic development.

Key Words: Economic Development, Food Security, Food Storage Initiative, Social Capital, Community Relationships

Introduction

The Mumuye people, residing in Adamawa and Taraba States, North Eastern Nigeria, face significant challenges in food security due to factors such as low agricultural productivity, poor

infrastructure, and limited access to markets (Danladi et al., 2021). The socio- economic impact of the United Methodist Church in Zing cannot be over emphasized considering the impact of the church on the socio-economic potentials of Mumuye people in Zing, which cannot be over emphasized. Zing is one of the Local Government Areas in Taraba State, North Eastern Nigeria whose source of livelihood depends on Agricultural activities, ranging from farming and rearing of animals. The Local Government has witnessed the presence of missionaries Catholic and Methodist (Unity Cup1993). These challenges are exacerbated by the region's vulnerability to climate change, pests, and diseases, which further compromise agricultural productivity and food availability. The United Methodist Church's food storage initiative seeks to mitigate these challenges by providing a stable food supply, thereby enhancing food security and promoting economic development.

Background of the Study

Food storage initiatives play a vital role in ensuring food security, particularly in rural communities where agricultural production is often seasonal (Claub et al., 2014). The United Methodist Church's food storage initiative in Mumuye land, Zing Local Government Area, Taraba State, aims to address food insecurity and promote economic development. This initiative is crucial in addressing the food security challenges faced by the Mumuye people, who are predominantly farmers and rely heavily on agriculture for their livelihood.

Overview of Food Security and Economic Development

Food security is a critical component of economic development, as it enables individuals and communities to access sufficient, safe, and nutritious food (Okoye et al., 2024). Economic development, in turn, is essential for improving living standards and reducing poverty. Research has shown that food security initiatives can have a positive impact on economic development by increasing agricultural productivity, improving health outcomes, and enhancing economic opportunities (Okoye et al., 2024). Furthermore, food security is essential for human well-being, as it enables individuals to lead active and healthy lives.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the theories of social capital, economic empowerment, and sustainable development. Social capital refers to the networks, norms, and trust that enable collective action and cooperation (Putnam, 2000). Economic empowerment involves enhancing individuals' and

communities' ability to make economic decisions and investments (Sen, 1999). Sustainable development seeks to balance economic, social, and environmental objectives to achieve long-term prosperity (Brundtland, 1987). The theoretical framework guiding this study is based on the following key concepts:

i. **Social Capital:** The United Methodist Church's food storage initiative fosters social capital by promoting community engagement, cooperation, and trust among Mumuye residents (Putnam, 2000).

ii. **Economic Empowerment:** The initiative empowers local farmers and communities by providing access to food storage facilities, thereby enhancing their economic stability and decision-making capacity (Sen, 1999).

ii. **Sustainable Development:** By addressing food insecurity and promoting economic development, the initiative contributes to sustainable development in Mumuye land (Brundtland, 1987).

The theoretical framework provides a comprehensive understanding of the initiative's impact on food security and economic development in Mumuye land. The United Methodist Church's food storage initiative has the potential to significantly impact food security and economic development in Mumuye land. By understanding the theoretical framework guiding this study, we can better appreciate the initiative's potential benefits and challenges.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach to explore the socio-economic impact of the United Methodist Church's food storage initiative on local economic development in Mumuye land, Zing Local Government Area, Taraba State. A case study design is adopted to gain an in-depth understanding of the initiative's impact on the local community. This design allows for a detailed examination of the initiative's operations, outcomes, and challenges.

Data collection methods include: Focus group discussions: Held with groups of beneficiaries and local farmers to gather information on their experiences, perceptions, and opinions about the initiative. Observations: Conducted to gather data on the initiative's operations, including food storage facilities, distribution processes, and community engagement activities and Document

analysis. There is also review of relevant documents, including reports, policies, and procedures related to the initiative.

Observations focus on Food storage facilities: Condition, capacity, and management of food storage facilities, procedures for distributing food to beneficiaries, including targeting, eligibility criteria, and delivery mechanisms and activities and initiatives aimed at promoting community participation, awareness, and ownership of the food storage initiative.

Method of Data Analysis

Data analysis employs qualitative methods, including:

Thematic analysis: Identifying, coding, and categorizing themes and patterns in the data to understand the initiative's impact, challenges, and successes. Content analysis: Analyzing documents, reports, and other written materials to gather information on the initiative's policies, procedures, and outcomes. Narrative analysis: Examining the stories and experiences of beneficiaries and stakeholders to gain a deeper understanding of the initiative's impact on their lives. By employing a qualitative research approach, this study provides a rich and nuanced understanding of the socio-economic impact of the United Methodist Church's food storage initiative on local economic development in Mumuye land.

Impact Assessment of the United Methodist Church's Food Storage Initiative

The United Methodist Church's food storage initiative has had a profound impact on the community, yielding several benefits.

i. Food Storage Initiative:

Food storage has had a profound impact on the community, yielding several benefits as:

Increased Food Availability and Accessibility:

The initiative has enhanced food availability and accessibility, thereby improving food security (Claub et al., 2014). This is attributed to:

Food storage facilities: Providing adequate storage facilities has reduced post-harvest losses and ensured a steady food supply (Danladi et al., 2021). The reduction in post-harvest losses has increased the availability of food for consumption and sale. Food storage facilities have also enabled farmers to store their produce for longer periods, allowing them to sell at better prices. This has improved the overall food security situation in the community. Furthermore, the initiative

has promoted efficient food storage practices, reducing waste and spoilage (FAO, 2018). The food storage facilities have been well-maintained, ensuring the quality and safety of stored food. By providing food storage facilities, the initiative has addressed a critical gap in the community's food system. The impact of the initiative on food availability and accessibility is evident in the improved livelihoods of community members.

Food Distribution:

Efficient distribution systems have ensured that food reaches vulnerable populations, including the poor and the elderly. The initiative has prioritized the needs of these populations, ensuring that they have access to nutritious food. Food distribution has been carried out in a transparent and accountable manner, minimising corruption and ensuring that food reaches those who need it most. The initiative's distribution systems have also promoted social cohesion, bringing community members together to support one another. By ensuring that food reaches vulnerable populations, the initiative has promoted equity and fairness in food distribution. The impact of the initiative's food distribution efforts is evident in the improved well-being of community members (Sen, 1999).

Providing market opportunities:

Creating a market for farmers' produce has increased their income and improved their livelihoods (Sen, 1999). The initiative has provided a stable market for farmers' produce, enabling them to plan and invest in their farming activities. By creating market opportunities, the initiative has promoted economic growth and development in the community. The impact of the initiative on farmers' income is evident in their improved livelihoods and ability to invest in their farms. Furthermore, the initiative has promoted entrepreneurship and small business development, enabling local businesses to thrive (World Bank, 2020).

Supporting Local Businesses:

Supporting local businesses has contributed to economic stability and growth in the community. The initiative has promoted local economic development by supporting businesses that provide essential goods and services. By supporting local businesses, the initiative has helped to retain money within the community, promoting economic multiplier effects. The impact of the initiative's support for local businesses is evident in the improved economic stability and growth of the community. Furthermore, the initiative has promoted a sense of community ownership and responsibility, encouraging local businesses to contribute to the community's development.

Strengthens Social Capital and Community Relationships:

The initiative has strengthened social capital and community relationships by: fostering community engagement and participation have promoted social cohesion and trust among community members (Putnam, 2000). The initiative has encouraged community members to work together to achieve common goals. By fostering community engagement, the initiative has promoted a sense of community ownership and responsibility. The impact of the initiative on social capital is evident in the improved relationships and trust among community members.

Building Relationships:

Farmers and local businesses building relationships with each other and with the community has promoted a sense of unity and cooperation. The initiative has encouraged collaboration and mutual support among community members. By building relationships, the initiative has promoted social cohesion and trust, essential for community development.

ii Improved Health and Well-being

The initiative has improved health and well-being by:

Providing access to nutritious food: Providing access to nutritious food has improved the health and well-being of community members (Okoye et al., 2024). The initiative has prioritized the provision of nutritious food, promoting healthy eating habits and lifestyles. By providing access to nutritious food, the initiative has reduced the risk of malnutrition and related health problems.

Reducing Food Insecurity:

Reducing food insecurity has decreased the risk of malnutrition and related health problems. The initiative has addressed food insecurity by providing a stable food supply and promoting sustainable food systems. By reducing food insecurity, the initiative has promoted health and well-being, enabling community members to lead active and healthy lives.

This study has provided a comprehensive assessment of the socio-economic impact of the United Methodist Church's food storage initiative on local economic development in Mumuye land, Zing Local Government Area, Taraba State. The findings of this study have significant implications for policy, practice, and future research.

Summary of Findings

The study's findings indicate that the initiative has had a positive impact on the community, yielding several benefits, including:

- i. Increased food availability and accessibility: The initiative has enhanced food availability and accessibility, thereby improving food security.
- ii. Improved income for farmers and local businesses: The initiative has improved income for farmers and local businesses, contributing to economic stability and growth.
- iii. Strengthened social capital and community relationships: The initiative has fostered community engagement and participation, promoting social cohesion and trust among community members.
- iv. Improved health and well-being: The initiative has improved health and well-being by increasing access to nutritious food and reducing food insecurity.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, several recommendations are proposed:

i. Scaling Up the Initiative:

Scaling up the initiative is crucial to increase its impact and reach more communities and beneficiaries (Ugwu, 2014). According to Sanginga et al. (2007), scaling up initiatives that support local farmers and businesses can lead to significant improvements in food security and economic stability.

ii. Providing Additional Support:

Providing additional support, including training and capacity-building programs, is essential to enhance the productivity and competitiveness of farmers and local businesses (Pretty et al., 2011). As noted by Altieri (2002), capacity-building programs can help farmers adopt sustainable agricultural practices, leading to improved crop yields and increased income.

iii. Fostering Community Participation:

Fostering community participation and engagement is critical to ensure that the initiative is responsive to community needs and priorities (Chambers, 1994). According to Cornwall (2008),

community participation can lead to increased ownership and sustainability of initiatives, as well as improved social cohesion and trust.

iv. Monitoring and Evaluation:

Regular monitoring and evaluation are necessary to assess the initiative's impact and identify areas for improvement (Patton, 2008). As noted by Baker (2000), monitoring and evaluation can help identify best practices and lessons learned, informing future initiatives and policy decisions.

v. Implications for Policy and Practice:

The study's findings have significant implications for policy and practice. Policymakers and practitioners should consider the following:

Vi. Food Security Policies:

Policies aimed at improving food security should prioritise initiatives that enhance food availability and accessibility (FAO, 2017). According to Maxwell et al. (2014), food security policies should focus on supporting local farmers and improving access to markets.

vii. Economic Development Strategies:

Economic development strategies should prioritise initiatives that support local businesses and farmers, promoting economic stability and growth (World Bank, 2019). As noted by Humphrey et al. (2004), supporting local businesses can lead to increased economic activity and job creation.

viii. Community-Based Initiatives:

Community-based initiatives should be prioritised to foster community engagement and participation, promoting social cohesion and trust (Putnam, 2000). According to Krishna (2007), community-based initiatives can lead to increased social capital and improved well-being.

Future Research Directions

Future research should focus on:

- i. **Longitudinal studies:** Conducting longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impact of the initiative.
- ii. **Comparative studies:** Conducting comparative studies to assess the impact of similar initiatives in different contexts.

iii. **Impact assessment:** Conducting impact assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of different interventions aimed at improving food security and promoting economic development.

By providing a comprehensive assessment of the socio-economic impact of the United Methodist Church's food storage initiative, this study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on food security and economic development. The study's findings and recommendations have significant implications for policy, practice, and future research, highlighting the importance of initiatives that address food insecurity and promote economic development.

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