ASSESSMENT OF RURAL YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN EKITI STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed rural youth involvement in community infrastructural development in Ekiti State, Nigeria. A multi-stage sampling procedure was used to select 182 rural youths from ten rural communities across five Local Government Areas in Ekiti State. Primary data were collected using a structured interview schedule. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequency counts, percentages, and means, while inferential statistics, including Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) and Chi-square, were used to test the hypothesis. The findings revealed that 50.0% of respondents were aged 18–30 years, 65.4% were male, and 51.6% were married. Furthermore, 61.0% were non -members of cooperative societies, and 38.5% had lived in their communities for 11–20 years. Community infrastructure was generally available, with town halls (95.1%), solar streetlights (94.0%), classrooms (90.7%), and health facilities (90.1%) recording the highest availability. Youth involvement was highest in project supervision (mean = 3.41), mobilization of funds (3.39), and contribution of time and labour (3.19), but relatively low in project planning (2.66), purchase of inputs (2.62), site identification (2.60), and donation of cash (2.41). Youth involvement is significantly related to age, household size, sex (χ^2 = 10.3; P = 0.006), and employment status (χ^2 = 17.0; P = 0.002). The study concludes that youth participation exists but is predominantly functional rather than transformative. It recommends that Community development associations, local government authorities, and other development stakeholders ensure that rural youth are adequately represented on community development committees.

Keywords: Rural youth; Community infrastructural development; Youth involvement; Community participation

INTRODUCTION

Community infrastructure development is a vital driver of socio-economic transformation, especially in developing nations like Nigeria, where rural and semi-urban access to basic amenities, such as roads, clean water, healthcare, and schools, remains severely inadequate (Aguene, 2022; Odunola *et al.,* 2022). To foster long-term sustainability, equity, and local project ownership, participatory development approaches have gained significant traction. These strategies prioritize the direct engagement of local populations, particularly young people, throughout the planning, execution, and maintenance phases of infrastructure projects (Odunola *et al.,* 2022).

Youths comprise a substantial segment of Nigeria's population and represent an invaluable human resource for grassroots development due to their energy, creativity, and adaptability (Nigussie *et al.,* 2024). Consequently, governments and development bodies increasingly advocate for youth inclusion to achieve inclusive growth. Globally, over 267 million young people reside in rural regions, highlighting their potential as catalysts for economic growth, civic responsibility, and social cohesion (ILO, 2019; United Nations, 2018). Active youth involvement in infrastructural initiatives provides opportunities for skills acquisition and employment while enhancing project relevance and community commitment (Banerjee & Duflo, 2019; Umeh, 2022).

However, youth participation in infrastructural development remains underutilized. Young people face significant structural barriers, including high unemployment, limited educational opportunities, inadequate financial resources, and systemic exclusion from decision-making processes (Nigussie *et al.,* 2024; Uzoagu, 2022). While rural communities often rely on self-help initiatives and collective action to overcome state deficits, top-down approaches often fail without local ownership (Nnajieto *et al.,* 2025). Overcoming these barriers is essential for unlocking the full developmental power of rural youths.

Despite growing research on community development, critical gaps in the literature persist. Many Nigerian studies treat community participation broadly without analyzing youth as a distinct demographic, thereby masking the specific factors driving or hindering their involvement (Udoma *et al.,* 2024). Existing scholarship predominantly focuses on entrepreneurship, political engagement, or urban youth contexts, rarely evaluating youth participation as a multi-stage process spanning project planning, resource mobilization, implementation, and maintenance (Odebiyi *et al.,* 2017; Omoniyi, 2025; Wabombo *et al.,* 2026).

Furthermore, few studies synthesize socio-economic profiles, personal motivations, structural constraints, and youth perceptions into a unified framework to explain developmental outcomes (Mba & Onyesom, 2020). As a result, empirical evidence regarding how youth participation influences overall project effectiveness and sustainability remains inconsistent. This underscores the necessity for context-specific empirical research, particularly in rural Southwest Nigeria, to evaluate the determinants, nature, and systemic impacts of youth engagement in community infrastructure development.

The broad objective of this study is to assess rural youth involvement in community infrastructural development in Ekiti State, Nigeria

The specific objectives are to:

i. describe the socio-economic variables of the rural youths in the study area;
ii. identify the infrastructural developments that rural youths are involved in;
iii. ascertain the different stages of rural community infrastructural developments that the youths are involved in

Research Hypothesis

Hypothesis H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between selected socio-economic characteristics of the respondents and the level of involvement of rural youths in the community infrastructural development.

To ground the measurement and analysis of youth involvement, this study adopts the participation continuum theories established by Arnstein (1969) (*Ladder of Citizen Participation*) and refined by White (1996) and Pretty (1995). Arnstein's framework conceptualizes citizen involvement across distinct hierarchical rungs, progressing from non-participation (manipulation, therapy) to degrees of tokenism (informing, consultation, placation), and ultimately to genuine citizen power (partnership, delegated power, citizen control). In rural development contexts, White (1996) categorizes these rungs into four operational forms: nominal, passive, functional, and transformative participation.

METHODOLOGY

The research was carried out in Ekiti State, Nigeria. Ekiti State is in Nigeria's Southwest region, with coordinates of $7^{o}40^{1}$ N and 5^{o} 15^{1} E in DMS (Degree Minutes Seconds) or 7.66667 and 5.25. (in decimal degrees). According to the 2006 Population Census, the state has a population of 2,384,212 people and a land area of 6,352km^2. Ekiti State is bordered on the North by Kwara State, on the South by Ondo State, on the West by Osun State, and on the East by Kogi State (Ekiti State Government, 2021). Ekiti State has a tropical climate with two distinct seasons. The rainy season (April-October) and the dry season (November-March) are the two seasons (November-March). Temperatures range from 21 to 28 degrees Celsius, with high humidity. During the rainy and dry (Harmattan) seasons, the south-west and northeast trade winds blow, respectively. In the south, there is tropical forest, and in the north, there is savannah (Adewumi *et al.,* 2023).

The population for this study comprises all rural youths in Ekiti State, Nigeria. The study adopted a multi-stage sampling procedure in selecting respondents from Ekiti State. At the first stage, one-third of the local government areas in Ekiti State were selected, making a total of five (5) Local Government Areas. The second stage involved randomly selecting two rural communities from each Local Government Area, resulting in ten (10) rural communities. The third stage involved the proportionate random sampling of 30% of rural youths registered with local youth associations and community development groups across the selected communities, resulting in a sample size of 182 youths. This sampling frame encompassed all eligible rural youths regardless of their prior or current level of involvement in community development initiatives.

Primary data were used for this research. The primary data were collected using a well-structured interview schedule. To determine the reliability of the interview schedule, the study instrument was subjected to test re-test method, in which the interview schedule was pre-tested in two (2) senatorial zones of Ekiti State.

The data collection instrument was used at a two-week interval among the same respondents; this was subjected to Cronbach's Alpha reliability test, with a value of 0.714, which is considered consistent and reliable. Descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution counts, percentages, mean, and standard deviation were used to analyse the objectives. Inferential statistics such as Chi-square and Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) were used to test the hypothesis.

Pearson Product Moment Correlation: Youth involvement was measured as a continuous composite score created by summing responses across the 11 Likert-type items (ranging from 1 = *Strongly Disagree/No Involvement* to 5 = *Strongly Agree/High Involvement*), yielding a continuous composite index range of 11 to 55.

Chi-Square Test: The continuous composite score was categorized into discrete levels (e.g., *Low, Medium, High Involvement*), which accounted for the reported degrees of freedom (df)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-Economic Characteristics of the Youths

Table 1 shows the socio-economic characteristics of youths in the study area. The respondents were relatively young, with 50.0% aged 18–30 years, 30.8% aged 31–40 years, and 19.2% aged 40 years or older; the mean age was 32 ± 8.9 years. This youthful composition indicates substantial potential to participate in community infrastructure development through labour, innovation, leadership, and project supervision, consistent with the United Nations' (2020) recognition of youth as important agents of sustainable development.

Males constituted 65.4% of respondents, compared with 34.6% females, indicating male dominance in community development activities. This may reflect gender-related socio-cultural and institutional factors that influence access to leadership and decision-making opportunities, as Umeh (2022) similarly reported. Regarding marital status, 51.6% were married, 45.6% single, 1.6% divorced, and 1.1% widowed, suggesting strong family and community ties that may encourage participation in development activities (Abukari *et al.,* 2022).

Most respondents (61.0%) had fewer than 5 household members, 37.9% had 5–10 members, and 1.1% had 11 or more; the mean household size was 3 ± 2.5. Christians constituted 75.3%, Muslims 22.5%, and adherents of traditional religion 2.2%. Above average (53.3%) of the youths were self-employed, 27.5% were unemployed, while 19.2% were employed. Only 39.0% belonged to cooperatives, compared with 61.0% who did not, indicating limited access to cooperative-based resources and networks.

Regarding residence, 38.5% had lived in the community for 11–20 years and 33.5% for 21–30 years, with a mean of 21.8 ± 9.9 years. Long-term residence may strengthen community attachment and collective participation (Torunczyk-Ruiz & Martinovic, 2020). Overall, the findings indicate favourable conditions for youth participation, although gender inclusion and cooperative membership require strengthening.

Table 1: Distribution of youths by socio-demographic characteristics

Variables	Frequency (n = 182)	Percentage (%)	Mean	SD
Age				
18–30	91	50.0		
31–40	56	30.8	32	8.9
>40	35	19.2		
Sex				
Male	119	65.4		
Female	63	34.6		
Marital Status				
Single	83	45.6		
Employed Married	94	51.6		
Divorced	3	1.6		
Widowed	2	1.1		
Household Size				
<5	111	61.0		
5–10	69	37.9	3	2.5
≥11	2	1.1		
Religion				
Christianity	137	75.3		
Islam	41	22.5		
Traditional	4	2.2		
Employment Status				
Employed	35	19.2		
Unemployed	50	27.5		
Self employed	97	53.3		
Membership of Cooperative				
Yes	71	39.0		
No	111	61.0		
Years in the Community				
≤10	26	14.3		
11–20	70	38.5		
21–30	61	33.5	21.8	9.9
31–40	15	8.2		
>40	10	5.5		

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

Community Infrastructures According to Their Availability

Table 2 presents the distribution of community infrastructure by availability as perceived by the respondents. The findings reveal considerable variation: basic social infrastructure such as town halls, solar streetlights, classrooms, and health facilities were widely available, whereas water, sanitation, markets, capacity-building programmes, libraries, and educational resources were less available.

Town halls ranked first, with 95.1% of respondents reporting their availability and 4.9% indicating otherwise. This suggests that town halls remain important for community meetings, social activities, conflict resolution, decision-making, and development planning. Solar street lights ranked second, with 94.0% reporting their availability and 6.0% their absence. Their widespread provision may improve security, mobility, and evening economic activities, particularly in rural communities with unreliable electricity supply.

Classroom construction and maintenance were available according to 90.7% of respondents, while 9.3% reported their absence. Similarly, 90.1% reported having health facilities available, compared with 9.9% who indicated otherwise. These findings indicate substantial investment in education and healthcare, which are essential for human capital development and community welfare. Health awareness campaigns were also widely available, with 87.9% confirming their presence and 12.1% reporting their absence. This suggests efforts to promote preventive healthcare and public health knowledge. Poverty eradication campaigns were available to 86.3% of respondents, indicating interventions aimed at improving household welfare and reducing socioeconomic vulnerability.

Healthcare centres were reported as available by 85.7% of respondents, while 14.3% indicated their absence. This complements the high availability of health facilities and suggests efforts to strengthen primary healthcare delivery. This finding aligns with the World Health Organisation's emphasis on accessible primary healthcare as fundamental to improving health outcomes and achieving universal health coverage. Road construction and maintenance were available in 81.3% of areas, while 18.7% reported their absence. Adequate roads facilitate movement, agricultural marketing, and access to schools and healthcare. Similarly, 80.8% reported available skills training programmes, which can improve employability, entrepreneurship, and livelihood opportunities, especially among youths.

However, water and sanitation infrastructure was less available. Only 56.0% reported available water wells, while 44.0% indicated their absence. Public toilets were available according to 53.8%, compared with 46.2% who reported otherwise. These deficiencies may expose communities to poor hygiene and waterborne diseases. Agricultural shows recorded equal responses, with 50.0% reporting availability and 50.0% indicating absence, suggesting uneven access to agricultural extension and knowledge-sharing opportunities despite their importance for disseminating innovations and improved farming practices.

Environmental sanitation programmes were available in only 45.1%, while 54.9% reported their absence. Drainage construction and maintenance were available in 44.0%, whereas 56.0% indicated their absence. These deficiencies may increase vulnerability to flooding, environmental degradation, and sanitation-related health problems. Market infrastructure was also inadequate, with only 41.8% reporting its availability and 58.2% indicating its absence. Limited market facilities may constrain agricultural commercialization, local trade, employment, and household income generation.

Capacity-building programmes recorded particularly low availability, with only 31.9% reporting their presence and 68.1% indicating their absence. This is concerning because capacity building strengthens leadership, technical competence, decision-making, and community participation. Community libraries were available in only 29.7% of schools, while 70.3% reported their absence. Books were the least available facility, with only 17.0% reporting availability, compared with 83.0% indicating their absence. This highlights serious gaps in educational support and access to information, potentially limiting literacy, lifelong learning, and youth development.

Overall, the findings indicate that community development efforts have concentrated more on basic physical and social infrastructure than on human capital, environmental, and economic infrastructure. Although the widespread availability of town halls, education, healthcare, roads, and solar lighting provides an important foundation for community welfare, deficiencies in water, sanitation, drainage, markets, capacity building, libraries, and learning resources remain major challenges. These gaps may undermine sustainable development and limit youths' effective participation in community initiatives.

The findings therefore imply the need for governments, development agencies, and community organizations to adopt a more balanced approach that combines physical infrastructure with investments in human capital, environmental sanitation, economic facilities, and knowledge resources. Strengthening these areas would improve community resilience, expand socioeconomic opportunities, and promote meaningful participation in development. This finding is consistent with Etukudo *et al.* (2023), who reported significant attention to infrastructure and social empowerment initiatives and emphasized the importance of integrated community development interventions.

Table 2: Distribution of Community Infrastructures According to Their Availability (n = 182)

Community Infrastructure	Available (F) (%)	Not Available (F) (%)	Rank
Construction of town halls	173 (95.1)	9 (4.9)	1st
Installation of solar street lights	171 (94.0)	11 (6.0)	2nd
Construction and maintenance of classrooms	165 (90.7)	17 (9.3)	3rd
Provision of health facilities	164 (90.1)	18 (9.9)	4th
Health awareness campaign	160 (87.9)	22 (12.1)	5th
Poverty eradication campaign	157 (86.3)	25 (13.7)	6th
Construction of health care centre	156 (85.7)	26 (14.3)	7th
Road construction/maintenance	148 (81.3)	34 (18.7)	8th
Skills training programs	147 (80.8)	35 (19.2)	9th
Building and repairing water wells	102 (56.0)	80 (44.0)	10th
Construction and maintenance of public toilets	98 (53.8)	84 (46.2)	11th
Agricultural shows	91 (50.0)	91 (50.0)	12th
Environmental sanitation	82 (45.1)	100 (54.9)	13th
Construction and maintenance of drainages	80 (44.0)	102 (56.0)	14th
Construction of markets	76 (41.8)	106 (58.2)	15th
Capacity building	58 (31.9)	124 (68.1)	16th
Construction of community library	54 (29.7)	128 (70.3)	17th
Provision of books to community library	31 (17.0)	151 (83.0)	18th

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

Involvement in the Different Stages of Infrastructural Development

Table 3 presents the distribution of youths according to their involvement in different stages of infrastructural development. The findings indicate that youth involvement was generally higher in supervisory and supportive activities than in planning, procurement, decision-making, and financial contributions.

Project supervision recorded the highest level of involvement, with 37.9% strongly agreeing and 18.7% agreeing, giving a combined positive response of 56.6%. Only 32.4% disagreed, while 11.0% were undecided. With the highest mean score of 3.41 and the top rank, this finding indicates that youths were more actively involved in monitoring projects than in making strategic decisions. Supervision requires physical presence and community commitment and may therefore be more accessible to youth than activities that require substantial financial resources or specialized authority. This finding supports participatory development theory, which emphasizes community monitoring as a means of promoting transparency and accountability. Mansuri and Rao (2018) similarly observed that community members are often more involved in monitoring and oversight than in project design and decision-making.

Mobilization of funds ranked second, with a mean score of 3.39. About 35.2% strongly agreed, and 17.6% agreed, representing 52.8% positive responses, while 30.2% disagreed and 17.0% were undecided. This suggests that many youths participate in mobilizing community resources, although a considerable proportion remain uninvolved. Contribution of time and labour ranked third, with a mean of 3.19; 47.8% agreed that they participated, compared with 35.2% who disagreed and 17.0% who were undecided. The finding suggests that youths may be more willing to contribute labour than money because physical effort requires fewer financial resources.

Attendance at community meetings ranked fourth, with a mean score of 3.14. Although 40.6% agreed that they attended meetings, 35.7% disagreed, and 23.6% were undecided. The relatively high uncertainty and disagreement suggest inconsistent participation in community meetings, which are important platforms for consultation, information sharing, and collective decision-making. Provision of expertise ranked fifth, with a mean of 3.09. About 41.2% agreed that they contributed their skills and knowledge, while 38.5% disagreed and 20.3% were undecided. This indicates that some youths possess useful expertise but may lack opportunities to apply their knowledge in community projects.

Youth involvement declined during actual project execution, ranking sixth with a mean of 2.87. Only 33.0% agreed, while 39.0% disagreed and 28.0% were undecided. This may be because contractors, government agencies, or technical professionals frequently control project execution. Similarly, involvement in project planning ranked seventh, with a mean of 2.66. Only 29.7% agreed, whereas 47.2% disagreed and 23.1% were undecided. This indicates that youths have limited influence over decisions concerning project priorities, budgeting, and implementation strategies. The finding agrees with the United Nations Development Programme (2022), which noted that youth participation in many developing contexts is often concentrated in implementation rather than planning and policy formulation.

Involvement in purchasing project inputs was also limited, with 31.8% agreeing and 51.1% disagreeing. Contribution of materials was even lower, with only 23.1% agreeing, compared with 49.4% who disagreed. These findings may reflect limited financial capacity among youths and institutional controls over procurement and project resources. Site identification ranked tenth, with a mean of 2.60; only 32.9% agreed, while 52.2% disagreed. This may be because community leaders, government officials, or technical experts often dominate site selection.

Cash donation recorded the lowest involvement, with a mean score of 2.41. Only 25.3% agreed that they contributed financially, while 59.3% disagreed and 15.4% were undecided. The low level of financial contribution may reflect limited income and employment opportunities among youths.

Overall, the findings show that youth participation is predominantly functional rather than transformative. Youths contribute more through supervision, fundraising, and labour than through planning, procurement, site selection, and financial decision-making. Their limited involvement in strategic stages may reduce their sense of ownership and weaken commitment to the sustainability of completed projects. The findings therefore highlight the need to strengthen youth representation in community development committees, provide leadership and technical training, and create institutional mechanisms for meaningful participation in planning and decision-making. Policies promoting youth employment, entrepreneurship, and access to financial resources could also enhance their capacity to contribute. The finding is consistent with Ajiye *et al.* (2023), who reported that 84.6% of youths agreed that they provided technical expertise during project execution in their study of youth participation in community development projects in Ibadan, Oyo State.

Table 3: Distribution of Youths According to Involvement in the Different Stages of Infrastructural Development (n = 182)

Involvement	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Undecided (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Mean	Rank
I am involved in project supervision	69 (37.9)	34 (18.7)	20 (11.0)	25 (13.7)	34 (18.7)	3.41	1st
I am involved in mobilization of funds	64 (35.2)	32 (17.6)	31 (17.0)	22 (12.1)	33 (18.1)	3.39	2nd
I am involved in contribution of time and labour	40 (22.0)	47 (25.8)	31 (17.0)	37 (20.3)	27 (14.9)	3.19	3rd
I am involved in attending meetings	43 (23.6)	31 (17.0)	43 (23.6)	33 (18.1)	32 (17.6)	3.14	4th
I am involved in provision of expertise	52 (28.6)	23 (12.6)	37 (20.3)	32 (17.6)	38 (20.9)	3.09	5th
I am involved in actual execution of projects	34 (18.7)	26 (14.3)	51 (28.0)	28 (15.4)	43 (23.6)	2.87	6th
I am involved in project planning	30 (16.5)	24 (13.2)	42 (23.1)	29 (15.9)	57 (31.3)	2.66	7th
I am involved in purchase of inputs	25 (13.7)	33 (18.1)	31 (17.0)	40 (22.0)	53 (29.1)	2.62	8th
I am involved in contribution of materials	22 (12.1)	20 (11.0)	50 (27.5)	49 (26.9)	41 (22.5)	2.62	8th
I am involved in site identification	37 (20.3)	23 (12.6)	27 (14.8)	22 (12.1)	73 (40.1)	2.60	10th
I am involved in donation of cash	16 (8.8)	30 (16.5)	28 (15.4)	53 (29.1)	55 (30.2)	2.41	11th

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

Test of Hypotheses

Test of Hypothesis One (a): Table 4 presents the test of the hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between the socio-economic characteristics (age and household size) and youths' involvement in community infrastructural development. The results show positive and significant relationships between youth involvement and both age (r = 0.103) and household size (r = 0.125). However, the relationships were very weak, with age and household size explaining only 1.0% and 1.5% of the variation in youth involvement, respectively (r^2 = 0.010 and 0.015).

The positive relationship implies that older youths tend to participate more in community infrastructure development, possibly because greater age brings more experience, social networks, and familiarity with community development processes. Similarly, the positive relationship with household size suggests that youths from larger households may be more involved, possibly because larger households provide more family labour to support participation in community projects.

The findings are consistent with Adegboye (2021), who reported significant positive relationships between age, household size, and community members' involvement in community-based agricultural and rural development projects. Based on the statistical analysis, the null hypothesis is rejected, showing that age and household size are statistically significantly related to youths' involvement in community infrastructural development. However, these individual relationships are practically negligible, given the very weak correlation coefficients (r = 0.103, r^2 = 0.010 for age; r = 0.125, r^2 = 0.015 for household size), which explain only 1.0% and 1.5% of the variance, respectively.

While the sample size (n = 182) provided sufficient statistical power to detect these minor effects, these variables are substantively unimportant. This indicates that while age and household size do play a measurable role, youths' participation in community infrastructure is overwhelmingly driven by other omitted factors, such as educational attainment, income level, civic engagement, or local governance structures. Consequently, these findings should be interpreted with caution to avoid overstating the influence of age and household size.

Table 4: Correlation Analysis showing the relationship between selected socio-economic characteristics and the level of involvement of youth in community infrastructural development.

Variables	Pearson Correlation Coefficient r	Coefficient of determination r^2	Decision	Contribution %
Age	0.103*	0.010	Significant	1.0
Household size	0.125*	0.015	Significant	1.5

Source: Field Survey, 2025

*Significant at the 0.05 level of significance

Test of Hypothesis One (b): Table 5 presents the test of the hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between socio-economic characteristics (sex and employment status) and youths' involvement in community infrastructural development. The results reveal positive and significant associations between sex, employment status, and level of youth involvement. At $p < 0.05$, sex ($\chi^2 = 10.3$; $P = 0.006$) and employment status ($\chi^2 = 17.0$; $P = 0.002$) were significantly associated with youth involvement. The findings indicate that both sex and employment status are important factors influencing youths' participation in community infrastructural development. The strong significance associated with employment status suggests that economic circumstances may determine youths' ability and willingness to participate. Employment may provide financial resources, social networks, and opportunities for engagement, while unemployed youths may face economic pressures that limit their participation despite potentially having more available time.

The significant association with sex also suggests differences in participation between male and female youths. Where male involvement is higher, socio-cultural expectations, domestic responsibilities, and limited access to decision-making opportunities may constrain female participation. This highlights the need for gender-inclusive approaches that create equal opportunities for both male and female youths.

The findings agree with Sidi *et al.* (2020), who reported that sex, marital status, and education significantly influenced beneficiaries' participation in community development programmes. Similarly, Jekamo *et al*. (2025) found a significant relationship between sex and youth involvement in Hadiya Zone, Central Ethiopia. Based on the significant relationships observed, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Table 5: Chi-Square analysis showing the relationship between the socio-economic characteristics **(**sex, employment status) and the level of involvement of youth in community infrastructural development.

Variables	X^2	**df**	**P-value**
Sex	10.3	2	0.006**
Employment status	17.0	4	0.002**

Source: Field Survey, 2025 **p≤0.05**

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study also concludes that youth involvement in community infrastructural development was more pronounced in supportive and operational activities than in strategic decision-making activities. Youths recorded their highest involvement in project supervision, mobilization of funds, and contribution of time and labour. However, their involvement was comparatively low in project planning, purchasing project inputs, contributing materials, identifying sites, and donating cash. This pattern demonstrates that youth participation exists in the study communities but is largely functional rather than transformative. In other words, youths help implement and support projects but have relatively limited influence over decisions that determine project priorities, location, resource allocation, and implementation processes.

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Community development associations, local government authorities, and other development stakeholders should ensure that rural youths are adequately represented in community development committees.
2. Government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and community-based organizations should provide regular training in project planning, leadership, financial management, procurement procedures, project monitoring, maintenance, and community mobilization.

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