RURAL BUSINESS AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION IN SOUTHEASTERN REGION OF ABIA STATE, ISIALA NGWA SOUTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, NIGERIA

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Abstract
Despite several government and development partner initiatives aimed at promoting rural development and reducing poverty in Nigeria, poverty remains pervasive in many rural communities, suggesting that existing interventions have not achieved the desired outcomes. This has renewed interest in rural businesses as a sustainable mechanism for stimulating local economic development and improving household welfare. This study examined the effect of rural businesses on poverty alleviation among smallholder farmers and agropreneurs in Isiala Ngwa South Local Government Area of Abia State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study investigated the effects of rural business innovation, capitalization of local resources, and employment generation on poverty alleviation. A quantitative survey research design was adopted, and data were collected from 322 respondents selected through a two-stage sampling technique. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 25. Poverty alleviation was operationalized using indicators of improved household income, enhanced living standards, increased access to basic needs, and improved economic wellbeing. The findings revealed that rural business innovation, capitalization of local resources, and employment generation each exerted a positive and statistically significant effect on poverty alleviation. The study concludes that strengthening rural business activities can enhance household welfare and contribute to sustainable poverty reduction within the study area. It therefore recommends that Local and State Government authorities strengthen entrepreneurship development programmes through capacity-building initiatives, improved access to infrastructure and affordable credit, and policies that encourage the effective utilization of local resources. The study further recommends expanding similar research to other rural communities in Southeastern Nigeria to improve the generalizability of the findings.

Keywords: Rural entrepreneurship, poverty alleviation, small and medium enterprises, agropreneurs, innovation, local resources, employment generation

1.0 Introduction

Poverty remains one of the most pressing socio-economic challenges confronting both developed and developing countries. It is a multidimensional phenomenon characterized not only by low income but also by deprivation in education, healthcare, employment opportunities, and access to basic social amenities. According to Dioloke, Joseph, and Ogbu (2021), poverty is aggravated by

rapid population growth, inadequate policies, and social discrimination. Despite significant global efforts to reduce poverty, the World Bank (2023) estimated that about 712 million people were living in extreme poverty in 2022, representing an increase of approximately 23 million people compared to 2019. The situation is particularly severe in Sub-Saharan Africa, where approximately 462 million people were projected to remain in extreme poverty in 2023 (World Bank, 2023).

Nigeria continues to experience a high incidence of poverty despite its enormous human and natural resource endowment. Agriculture remains one of the country's major economic sectors with significant potential for employment generation and income creation. However, poverty persists, particularly in rural communities where economic opportunities are limited and livelihoods largely depend on agriculture and informal business activities. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2022), about 63% of Nigerians are multidimensionally poor, with poverty being considerably higher in rural areas (72%) than in urban areas (42%). Recent development reports have also emphasized that strengthening local economies through entrepreneurship and rural enterprise development represents one of the most sustainable approaches to reducing poverty and promoting inclusive economic growth (Effiong & Essien, 2022).

Rural entrepreneurship, which involves establishing and managing businesses in rural communities outside major urban centres, has increasingly been recognized as an important driver of economic development. According to Idoko (2023), rural entrepreneurship contributes to economic growth by creating employment opportunities, reducing rural–urban migration, promoting local production, and improving household incomes. Successful examples include the Daura Women's Cooperative in Katsina State, which has generated employment through the production of traditional textiles, and the Osun State Goat Rearing Initiative, which has enhanced local employment while expanding livestock supply to neighbouring states (Idoko, 2023). These initiatives demonstrate the capacity of rural enterprises to stimulate local economic activities and improve the welfare of rural households.

Entrepreneurship contributes to poverty reduction through several mechanisms. It creates employment opportunities by establishing new businesses and expanding existing enterprises, increases household income, promotes innovation, and enhances the productive utilization of available resources. Ali and Ali (2013) observed that an increase in entrepreneurial activities is associated with improvements in income levels and reductions in poverty indicators. Similarly, Mitra and Abubakar (2021) argued that successful local enterprises stimulate indigenous economic growth and reduce dependence on the uncertain nature of foreign direct investment. Furthermore, entrepreneurship promotes economic independence by generating sustainable income for entrepreneurs, employees, and other stakeholders involved in the production process. Consequently, rural entrepreneurship has become an important strategy for fostering inclusive economic growth and improving living standards in developing economies.

Although rural poverty has been associated with challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, limited access to finance, insecurity, weak institutional support, and rural–urban migration, recent studies suggest that strengthening entrepreneurial capacity offers a sustainable pathway for addressing these constraints. Rather than relying solely on government interventions,

entrepreneurship enables rural residents to utilize locally available resources, introduce innovative business practices, and develop the skills required to establish and sustain profitable enterprises. Accordingly, this study focuses on three important dimensions of rural entrepreneurship rural business innovation, capitalization of local resources, and entrepreneurial training as strategic mechanisms through which poverty can be alleviated in rural communities.

Recent globalization, technological advancement, and changing market conditions have also transformed the rural business environment, creating both opportunities and challenges for entrepreneurs (Sopiko, Polina, & Ani, 2013). Rural communities offer certain competitive advantages, including lower operating costs, reduced competition, and the availability of local resources. However, challenges such as inadequate business infrastructure, poor transportation networks, limited access to market information, insufficient financing opportunities, and relatively small local markets continue to constrain enterprise growth (Folorunso, 2020). These conditions underscore the importance of promoting entrepreneurial innovation, effective resource utilization, and capacity building to improve enterprise performance and enhance rural livelihoods.

Despite the growing body of literature on entrepreneurship and poverty alleviation, existing studies have largely examined entrepreneurship as a broad concept, with limited attention given to the specific entrepreneurial dimensions that influence poverty reduction in rural communities. In particular, empirical evidence on the effects of rural business innovation, capitalization of local resources, and entrepreneurial training on poverty alleviation in Southeastern Nigeria remains limited. This study therefore seeks to fill this gap by examining how these dimensions of rural entrepreneurship influence poverty alleviation among rural business operators in Southeastern Nigeria. The findings are expected to provide useful evidence for policymakers, development practitioners, and other stakeholders in designing strategies that strengthen rural entrepreneurship as a sustainable tool for poverty reduction and inclusive economic development.

The study therefore, seeks to examine the impact of Rural Businesses and povertyAlleviation in Southeastern Region of Nigeria, with a specific focus on Small and Medium Agropreneurs in Ngwa town, Abia State. The specific objectives were:

i. To investigate the effect of rural business innovation of local production systems on poverty alleviation in Ngwa, Abia State.
ii. To examine the effect of rural business capitalization of local resources on poverty alleviation in Ngwa, Abia State.
iii. To examine the effect of rural business employment generation on poverty alleviation in Ngwa, Abia State.

Base on there search objectives above, the following research questions were proposed:

i. How does rural business innovation in local production systems affect poverty alleviation in Ngwa, Abia State?
ii. What is the effect of rural business capitalization of local resources on povertyalleviation in Ngwa, Abia State?
iii. How does rural business employment generation affect poverty alleviation in Ngwa,Abia State?

2.0 Literature Review

Concept of Rural Business

Entrepreneurship refers to the process through which individuals identify business opportunities, mobilize resources, establish enterprises, and assume the associated risks with the expectation of generating economic and social value. It involves the ability and willingness of entrepreneurs to organize and manage business ventures under conditions of uncertainty while pursuing profit and long-term sustainability (Evans, 2019; Byjus, 2023). Beyond wealth creation, entrepreneurship contributes significantly to innovation, employment generation, productivity improvement, and economic development.

Rural business, often referred to as rural entrepreneurship, represents entrepreneurial activities undertaken within rural communities by utilizing locally available resources to produce goods and services that meet community and market needs. According to Priyakshi (2020), rural business involves establishing productive enterprises in rural areas with the objective of generating employment, reducing poverty, promoting local industrialization, and improving the standard of living of rural households. Unlike urban enterprises, rural businesses are closely linked with agriculture, agro-processing, local crafts, tourism, and other community-based economic activities that utilize indigenous resources and knowledge.

The importance of rural business has gained increasing recognition in both developed and developing countries because of its potential to stimulate local economic development and reduce regional inequalities. Recent studies emphasize that rural entrepreneurship strengthens community resilience by promoting innovation, employment creation, efficient utilization of local resources, and sustainable livelihoods. It also enhances social inclusion and contributes to achieving sustainable development goals, particularly those relating to poverty reduction, decent work, and inclusive economic growth.

In Nigeria, successive governments have introduced several programmes aimed at promoting rural entrepreneurship and stimulating economic development. These include the National Accelerated Food Production Programme (1972), the Nigerian Agricultural and Cooperative Bank (1972), Operation Feed the Nation (1976), the Green Revolution Programme (1979), the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (1986), the National Directorate of Employment (1987), the Family Economic Advancement Programme (1993), the National Poverty Eradication Programme (2001), the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (2004), the Seven-Point Agenda (2007), and other community development initiatives (Paul, Datong, & Bagobiri, 2014). Despite these interventions, rural poverty remains widespread, indicating that policy interventions alone are insufficient without strengthening entrepreneurial capacity, innovation, and effective resource utilization.

Challenges of Rural Businesses

Although rural businesses contribute significantly to employment generation and poverty reduction, their development continues to face numerous challenges. Folorunso (2020) identified declining employment opportunities, inadequate technical knowledge, poor infrastructure, limited entrepreneurial capacity, and insufficient business support services as major constraints affecting rural enterprises.

In many rural communities, the migration of young and skilled individuals to urban centres has resulted in an ageing entrepreneurial population and a shortage of innovative business ideas. This demographic shift weakens enterprise development and reduces the availability of skilled labour required for business expansion. Similarly, poor transportation networks, unstable electricity supply, inadequate digital infrastructure, and weak market linkages limit the competitiveness of rural enterprises and increase production costs.

Access to finance also remains a major challenge for rural entrepreneurs. Limited collateral, poor financial literacy, and inadequate access to formal credit institutions often prevent entrepreneurs from expanding their businesses or adopting modern technologies. Recent literature further highlights that weak institutional support, poor governance, and inadequate business development services continue to constrain rural enterprise growth in many developing economies. Consequently, creating an enabling business environment through improved infrastructure, financial inclusion, institutional support, and entrepreneurial capacity building remains essential for sustainable rural development.

Essential Resources for Promoting Rural Businesses

The success of rural businesses depends largely on the availability and effective utilization of critical entrepreneurial resources. Ibrahim (2023) argued that entrepreneurial success in rural communities is influenced by both internal resources possessed by entrepreneurs and external resources available within the business environment.

Human capital constitutes one of the most important resources for rural enterprise development. Entrepreneurs with adequate education, technical competence, managerial skills, innovative capacity, and positive entrepreneurial attitudes are better equipped to identify business opportunities, manage risks, and sustain enterprise growth (Onileowo, 2024). Entrepreneurial knowledge also facilitates the adoption of improved technologies and enhances business competitiveness.

Family support equally plays a significant role in rural enterprise development. Families often provide financial assistance, labour, production facilities, marketing support, and emotional encouragement, thereby reducing start-up costs and improving business survival (Ibrahim, 2023). In many rural communities, family-owned assets such as land, buildings, and production equipment provide important foundations for business establishment and expansion.

Community resources also contribute substantially to the sustainability of rural businesses. Local communities provide customers, employees, suppliers, business networks, and informal advisory services that enhance enterprise performance. Where formal institutions such as banks, accountants, and legal services are limited, community-based support systems become indispensable for business survival (Kalantaridis & Bika, 2006).

Furthermore, the capitalization of local resources including agricultural products, indigenous knowledge, natural resources, cultural heritage, and traditional skills creates opportunities for product diversification, value addition, and competitive advantage (Siemens, 2009). Effective utilization of these resources enables rural entrepreneurs to produce unique goods and services while stimulating local economic development and employment generation.

To strengthen rural businesses, Ibrahim (2023) recommended promoting existing rural enterprises, improving physical and digital connectivity, creating a favourable regulatory environment, strengthening entrepreneurial capabilities through continuous training, and encouraging collaboration among small-scale entrepreneurs. These strategies are expected to enhance enterprise performance, increase household income, create employment opportunities, and contribute significantly to poverty alleviation.

Overall, the literature demonstrates that rural businesses are important instruments for promoting employment generation, stimulating innovation, enhancing the utilization of local resources, and improving household welfare. Nevertheless, most existing studies have focused on entrepreneurship broadly, with limited empirical attention given to how rural business innovation, capitalization of local resources, and employment generation jointly influence poverty alleviation in Southeastern Nigeria. This gap provides the empirical justification for the present study.

Innovationinlocalproductionsystems

There is no consensus on the definition of innovation, as the concept extends beyond mere invention to encompass the ability to apply knowledge in developing new ideas that bring about changesinanorganizationorsocietyatlarge.Theterm'innovation'originatesfromtheLatinword 'innovare,' meaning "into new." It signifies doing something differently (Ajulor & Etim, 2019). Innovation addresses future problems by combining ideas to connect present achievements with pastexperiences.Today,theglobaleconomythrivesoninnovation, withnewvaluesbeingcreated daily, particularlyin competitiveenvironments (Baskaran &Melita,2016).Innovation is essential in all areas of life, including business, government, agriculture, education, sciences, and health. It involves transforming ideas into new products and services that offer greater value (Bareggheh, Rowley & Sambrook, 2019).

Francke and Alexander (2019) contend that local entrepreneurs need to innovate their business models, suggesting that transforming their business systems can help identifyareas where market innovation is most needed (Francke &Alexander, 2019). This process of re-engineering business models may involve disruptive innovation, which should be supported by effective management (Nel-Sanders & Thomas, 2022). However, they emphasize that a comprehensive approach to innovation is essential.

Innovation in local production can result in the creation of new products and services tailored to the specific needs of local communities, thereby enhancing their quality of life (Crescenzi, Giua& Pietrobelli, 2020). For example, agricultural innovations can boost crop yields, reduce food insecurity and improve nutrition. Similarly, innovations in healthcare can lead to better health outcomes, alleviating the disease burden on local communities. However, innovation in local production does not automatically alleviate poverty. Policies and initiatives promoting innovation must be inclusive and pro-poor to ensure that the benefits are distributed equitablyamong all members of society (Hanson, Blake & McKay, 2020). This might involveprovidingtrainingandcapacity-buildingprogramsformarginalizedgroupsandpromoting access to finance and technology.

***H_{01}**: Rural business innovation in local production systems significantly impacts alleviation of poverty in Ngwa,Abia State.*

Capitalizationoflocalresources

Entrepreneurship has been described as the practice of engaging in creative activities to gain a competitive edge, is central to innovation (Nel-Sanders & Thomas, 2022). It is the catalyst for increasinginnovativecapacity,growthpotential,andstrengtheningaregion'seconomicfoundation (Surugia and Surugia, 2018).Therefore, through the utilization of rural capital entrepreneurshipis essential for promoting rural development and alleviating poverty in rural areas.

Rural capital, as an organizing concept for rural development, was introduced byCastle (1998). It encompasses natural capital, man-made capital, human capital, and social capital. Natural capital includes elements of the natural environment that contribute to human satisfaction, either directly or indirectly. Man-made capital pertains to the economic potential of the physical environment. Human capital is influenced by the working-age population size (with growth expanding human capital) and investments in education and training (which deepen human capital). Social capital involves community networking, trust, and relationships (Windapo, 2018).

Ibrahim(2023) argued that the success of entrepreneurship in a rural environment depends on the availabilityof resources in that particular environment.These resources include, Skill andattitude of the entrepreneurs, family support/business, business resources and community resources. According to him, all these resources interact and complement each other toensure thesuccess of entrepreneurship in a particular rural environment, which in turn shapes resource availability. Ultimately, the environment in which an entrepreneur operates cannot be ignored because it influencesandshapesthetypeand amountsofresourcesthatareavailable (FranckeandAlexander, 2019).

The preservation and development of ruralcapitalarecrucialfor rural populations as theyaddress local challenges and pursue their goals (Ibrahim, 2023). These efforts can sometimes lead to the depletion of certain forms of rural capital while generating others (Castle, 1998). The prevalence of different types of rural capital significantly affects rural entrepreneurship and impact poverty alleviation. In turn, rural entrepreneurs' activities are key drivers in the accumulation of rural capital.

***H_{02}**: Rural business capitalization of local resources significantly impacts the alleviation of poverty in Ngwa, AbiaState.*

Ruralemploymentgeneration

Rural povertyremains a significant problemin manydeveloping countries,where people struggle withfewjobopportunities,lowincomes,andinadequateaccesstoessentialservices.Oneeffective way to tackle this issue is through entrepreneurship, which allows individuals to earn a stable income and improve their lives. Entrepreneurial activities in rural areas, such as farming, crafts, and small-scale manufacturing, can generate jobs, boost local economies, and foster overall economic growth.

These ventures are especially crucial for groups like rural youth and women, who often face exclusion from formal job sectors. Additionally, rural entrepreneurship supports local resources, reduces reliance on outside help, and preserves traditional skills and knowledge. Bybacking rural

entrepreneurship, policymakers empower communities to lead their own development efforts and reduce poverty.

However, starting businesses in rural areas comes with challenges like limited access to money, infrastructure, and markets. Overcoming these obstacles requires a broad strategy that includes training, financial support, and connections to markets. Governments, NGOs, and private companies can collaborate to create conditions that encourage entrepreneurship in rural areas, promotingsustainabledevelopmentandliftingpeopleoutofpoverty.Supportingrural entrepreneurshipunlocksthepotentialofthesecommunities,fosteringinclusivegrowthand lasting change.

***H_{03}**: Rural business employment generation positively affects poverty alleviation in Ngwa, Abia State.*

Poverty

The definition of poverty remains elusive and subjective, lacking consensus. Economists and development experts have introduced three main indices to quantifypoverty. Firstly, the "Poverty headcount index" measures poverty monetarily, defining individuals with daily incomes or consumption below $3.20 as living below the poverty line. Secondly, the "multi-dimensional poverty index" identifies the poor as those lacking access to essential necessities like nutrition, housing,water,sanitation,education,healthcare,electricity,andotherbasicneeds(Effiong,2020). The third, more recent concept is the "Happy Planet index," which assesses poverty through subjective lifesatisfaction, lifeexpectancy, and ecological impact.This perspective argues thatan elderly person living in modest conditions but reporting happiness and satisfaction should not necessarily be labeled as 'poor,' challenging conventional definitions (Effiong, Essien, & Patrick, 2020).

Additionally, Umoh (2022) noted that despite the increasing discovery of natural resources and unprecedented national prosperity, mass poverty continues to exist, particularly in regions like Africa. According to the Britannica Dictionary (2023), poverty is the state of lacking a usual or sociallyacceptable amount of money or material possessions. It occurs when people cannot meet theirbasicneeds.Identifyingpoorpeoplerequiresdeterminingwhatconstitutesbasicneeds,which can be defined narrowlyas "those necessaryfor survival" or more broadlyas "those reflecting the prevailing standard of living in the community." The first definition includes only those on the verge of starvation or death from exposure, while the second includes those whose nutrition, housing, and clothing, though sufficient to preserve life, fall below the community's standard of living. Poverty means not having enough money to meet basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter.

Regardless of the theoretical approach, povertydegrades human dignityand surpasses boundaries ofnationalityandethnicity.Thecausesofpovertyvarysignificantly.Forinstance,Omoniyi(2018) attributes Nigerian povertyprimarilytostructural deficienciessuchas weakeconomic, social,and politicalsystems,whichfosterunemployment,corruption,poorgovernance,lowproductivity,and inadequate human development. These structural weaknesses are compounded by issues like environmental degradation, inter-ethnic conflicts, and insufficient agricultural and infrastructure development, exacerbating poverty (Esin, Ebong, & Uting, 2018).

In response to the widespread poverty, over the past seven years, the Nigerian government has significantly intensified efforts to alleviate relative poverty. These measures include establishing the Ministryof Disaster Management and Humanitarian Services, tasked with coordinating social investment programs like conditional cash transfers, temporaryemployment for graduates,school feeding initiatives, and trader money, aimed at reducing poverty (Effiong and Essien, 2022).

A notable initiative introduced in 2017 was the Federal government's Social Investment Programme (SIP), aimed at combating extreme poverty. Key components included monthly stipends ofN5000 toimpoverished households through conditional cash transfers,the recruitment and training of unemployed graduates under the N-Power Programme with a monthly financial benefit of N30,000, and a nationwide school feeding program providing daily meals to primary school children. However, these programs have faced challenges in effectively addressing rural poverty,asasignificantproportionofruralpoorareoftenexcludedfromthesocialregisterfor conditional cash transfers. Transparency and fairness issues have also marred initiatives such as the recruitment of unemployed graduates, with allegations of corruption and nepotismin program designandimplementation.Theseconcerns echoDanaan's (2021)argumentthatNigeria's poverty problem lies not in the absence of anti-poverty strategies but in the lack of governmental resolveto ensure their efficacy. Sugeng (2017) similarlycontends that povertyalleviation efforts in many developing countries, including Nigeria, tend to be elite-driven, neglecting the perspectives and needs of the impoverished communities they aim to serve.

TheoreticalReview

This theory was established on the assumptions of Resource Based View theory of Barney (1991). Resource-Based Theory (RBT), first articulated by Penrose (2009), revolutionized strategic management by conceptualizing firms as collections of unique resources. This theory, emerging from earlier studies on firm growth, gained prominence in the 1990s through the work of Jay Barney, solidifying its place in strategic planning and management.

Resource-Based Theory (RBT) focuses on how companies gain a competitive edge byusing their own resources effectively, rather than relying on outside market conditions (Kozlenkova, Samaha & Palmatier, 2014). It has two main ideas: First, businesses have different resources that set them apart from each other and second,these resources are hard to copy between businesses.

It contends that local resources and urban resources differ and unique from each other. This framework highlights the importance of using unique, valuable, and hard-to-copy resources to succeed in changing business environments (Barney, 1991).

Resource-BasedTheory(RBT)divided companyresources intotwo types: tangible and intangible assets,eachcontributingdifferentlytocompetitive advantage (Barney, 1991;Molloyet al., 2011). Tangible assets encompassed physical items like land, buildings, machinery, equipment, and capital. These resources seldom conferred a competitive edge since competitors could usually obtain them, while intangible assets included non-physical assets like intellectual property, skills, knowledge, goodwill, and brand reputation (Gordon, 2024). These resources were challenging to replicate and typically constituted the primary source of sustainable competitive advantage.

Dynamic capabilities, which stemmed from RBT, showed how companies could change and develop newideas basedon what customers wanted and what was happening in the world (Utami and Alamanos, 2023).

Resource-Based Theory (RBT) helped understand how rural businesses could use what was around them to create lasting jobs and opportunities. By improving both tangible (like roads and trees) and intangible (like local knowledge and community connections) resources, rural business owners could enhance productivity, increase earnings, and improve their communities (Utami and Alamanos, 2023). By assisting local people in learning new skills, generating new ideas, and obtaining what they needed to run businesses, rural areas could leverage their own resources to grow and improve residents' lives.

Empirical Review

Mohammed and Ndulue evaluated the impact of social entrepreneurship on poverty reduction, focusingonWecyclersSocialEntrepreneurshipLtd(WCSEL)inLagosState.Datawerecollected primarily from secondary sources, and analysis was conducted using ordinary least squares regression with the EViews statistical package. Their findings revealed a significant positive relationship between social entrepreneurship and poverty reduction.

Ijiwole (2019) conducted a study titled "Employment Generation and Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria: The Role of Social Entrepreneurship" using a descriptive survey methodology. Thestudy sampled 150 members of the Nigeria Association of Social Workers, Federal Capital Territory (FCT)Abuja Chapter, employing purposive sampling. Findings revealed significant relationships between dimensions of social entrepreneurship such a social problem solving, social value, social responsibility, and teamwork and both employment generation and poverty alleviation. The study concluded that embracing social entrepreneurship could significantly contribute to sustainable economic development in Nigeria, recommending its broader adoption across governmental, private, and non-governmental sectors to address societal challenges effectively.
Ogundele (2005) conducted a study that also underscored the significant impact of rural entrepreneurship on poverty alleviation. Similarly, Chinonye and Maxwell (2014) explored the role of social entrepreneurship as a tool fo rmeeting poverty reduction and sustainable development goals. They utilized a structured questionnaire to collect data from 300 staff members ofASAFE,a social enterprise in Cameroon. Their analysis, employing ordinary least squares regression, demonstrated a positive and significant relationship between social entrepreneurship and poverty reduction.Jan (2012) investigated the relationship between social entrepreneurship and poverty reduction through a surveydesign. The study involved primary data collection via structured questionnaires from 300 respondents, revealing a positive correlation between social entrepreneurship activities and poverty reduction efforts. Richard (2012), in contrast, examined the impact of rural entrepreneurship on poverty reductionin Istanbul, Turkey. Through a structured questionnaire distributed among 7000 social entrepreneurs, Richard found no significant positive relationship between social entrepreneurship and poverty reduction in that context.

Kanitkar (1994) conducted case studies involving 86 village-based entrepreneurs and microenterprise owners across rural India to explore their emergence and success. Using a case survey method with semi-structured questionnaires and open-ended interviews, Kanitkar found

that many entrepreneurs shifted from agriculture to non-farm activities due to socio-economic motivations.Theyfacedchallengesinraisingresourcesbutsuccessfullyenteredbusinessactivities (Kanitkar, 1994). McMullan and Gillin (1998) surveyed graduates from Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne, Australia, discovering that 87% of students started ventures independently or with corporate support (McMullan & Gillin, 1998). Abdullah (1999) conducted a survey of 185 small and medium-sized enterprises in Penang, Malaysia, evaluating their access to government-sponsored support programs.Abdullah used structured questionnaires and identified barriers such as cumbersome legislative processes and lack of program awareness hindering access to support (Abdullah, 1999).

Kodithuwakku and Rosa (2002) conducted a qualitative case study on Sri Lankan villagers to examine entrepreneurial processes among Mahaveli rural entrepreneurs. They found that successful farmers diversified into multiple income-generating ventures, expanding beyond agriculture (Kodithuwakku&Rosa,2002). WangandWong(2004)studieduniversity undergraduate students in Singapore to analyze interest in entrepreneurship. They used historical regression and identified factors like gender, family business experience, and education level influencing students' entrepreneurial interest (Wang & Wong, 2004). Agupusi(2007)examinedtheroleofsmallbusinessesinpovertyalleviationinAlexandra,South Africa, through critical analysis of secondary data and primary interviews. Agupusi highlightedthe potential of informal and semi-formal small enterprises to alleviate poverty with government andprivatesectorsupport(Agupusi,2007).Similarly,Srirametal.(2007)developedaresearch frameworkforentrepreneurshipdevelopmentinAfrican-Americanregions,emphasizing motivation, skills, and cultural impacts on entrepreneurial behavior (Sriram et al., 2007).

3.0 Methodology

The study was conducted in Isiala Ngwa South Local Government Area of Abia State, Nigeria. The Local Government Area has a population of 134,762 people and covers an area of approximately 258 km² (National Population Commission, 2006). It is bounded by Umuocheala to the south, Nbutu to the east, Umunevo to the north, and Owerrinta to the west. The inhabitants are predominantly farmers engaged in the cultivation of crops such as yam, cassava, cocoyam, maize, and other tropical produce. Isiala Ngwa South comprises 48 communities (Isiala Ngwa South Geographical Setting, 2017), making it an appropriate location for investigating the contribution of rural businesses to poverty alleviation. The study adopted a quantitative survey research design. Survey research is appropriate because it enables the collection of quantitative data from a relatively large number of respondents using a structured questionnaire. The design facilitates the examination of relationships between rural business activities and poverty alleviation and allows the findings to be generalized to the study population.

The target population comprised all smallholder farmers operating within Isiala Ngwa South Local Government Area. Preliminary records obtained from the NGWA HUB farmers' online platform indicated that the platform had over 4,200 registered members. However, after screening the database to remove duplicate registrations, inactive members, and individuals who did not meet the study's inclusion criteria, 1,635 active smallholder farmers and agropreneurs constituted the accessible population used for the study. This accessible population formed the basis for determining the sample size.

A two-stage sampling technique was employed. In the first stage, purposive sampling was used to identify eligible smallholder farmers and agropreneurs registered on the NGWA HUB platform who were actively engaged in farming or agro-related businesses within Isiala Ngwa South Local Government Area. Although the NGWA HUB platform served as the sampling frame because it provided a comprehensive and verifiable list of active farmers, it is acknowledged that farmers without internet access or social media participation may not have been captured. This limitation is recognized and should be considered when interpreting the findings. In the second stage, simple random sampling was used to select respondents from the accessible population of 1,635 farmers.

The sample size was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula:

n =N /(1+ N(e^2))

Where:

n= samplesize

N=populationsize(inthiscase,1,635)

e=desiredlevelofprecision(marginoferror)

Let's assume a desired level of precision (e)of 0.05(5% margin of error). Plugging in the values, we get:

n=1,635/(1+1,635(0.05^2)) n=1,635/(1+1,635(0.0025))

n=1,635 /(1+4.0875)

n=1,635 /5.0875

n ≈322,thesamplesize(n)wouldbeapproximately 322.

Collected data was analyzed with the use of descriptive statistical tools such as frequency and percentagewhile the hypothesis was tested using regression analysis.

Results and Discussion

Table 1:

Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	214	66.5	66.5	66.5
	Female	108	33.5	33.5	100.0
	Total	322	100.0	100.0	

Source: Authors Field survey, 2026.

Table 1 presents the distribution of participants by gender. Out of a total of 322 respondents, 214 (66.5%) are male, and 108 (33.5%) are female. This indicates a higher proportion of male participants compared to female participants in the study.

Table 2:
Marital status

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Single	137	42.5	42.5	42.5
	Married	185	57.5	57.5	100.0
	Total	322	100.0	100.0	

Source: Authors Field survey, 2026.

Table 2 provides the marital status of the participants. Out of 322 respondents, 137 (42.5%) are single, and 185 (57.5%) are married. This shows that a majority of the participants are married, with a smaller proportion being single.

Table 3:
Age Group

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	16-25	38	11.8	11.8	11.8
	26-35	233	72.4	72.4	84.2
	36-45	24	7.5	7.5	91.6
	46 and above	27	8.4	8.4	100.0
	Total	322	100.0	100.0	

Source: Authors Field survey, 2026.
Table 3 outlines the age distribution of the participants. Of the 322 respondents, 38 (11.8%) are aged 16-25, 233 (72.4%) are aged 26-35, 24 (7.5%) are aged 36-45, and 27 (8.4%) are aged 46 and above. The largest age group is 26-35, making up the majority of the participants, while the other age groups have significantly smaller representations.

Table 4:
Education

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No formal education	7	2.2	2.2	2.2
	Primary education	51	15.8	15.8	18.0
	Secondary education	141	43.8	43.8	61.8
	Tertiary education	123	38.2	38.2	100.0
	Total	322	100.0	100.0	

Source: Authors Field survey, 2026.

Table 4 illustrates the educational background of the participants. Among the 322 respondents, 7 (2.2%) have no formal education, 51 (15.8%) have completed primary education, 141 (43.8%)

have completed secondary education, and 123 (38.2%) have attained tertiary education. The majority of the participants have secondary education, followed by those with tertiary education, indicating a relatively high level of educational attainment within the group.

Table 5:
Length in Business

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0 - 4 years	32	9.9	9.9	9.9
	4 - 9 years	189	58.7	58.7	68.6
	> 15 years	101	31.4	31.4	100.0
	Total	322	100.0	100.0	

Source: Authors Field survey, 2026.

Table 5 presents the length of time participants have been in business. Out of 322 respondents, 32 (9.9%) have been in business for 0-4 years, 189 (58.7%) for 4-9 years, and 101 (31.4%) for over 15 years. This indicates that the majority of participants have been in business for 4-9 years, with a significant portion also having over 15 years of experience.

Test of Hypothesis

Ho1:*Rural business innovation in local production systems has no significant effect on poverty alleviation in Ngwa, Abia State*.

Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.982[a]	.965	.965	.20943	.546

a. Predictors: (Constant), Innovation in Local production
b. Dependent Variable: Poverty alleviation

The model summary reveals a very high correlation (R = 0.982) between innovation in local production and poverty alleviation. The R Square of 0.965 indicates that approximately 96.5% of the variance in povertyalleviation can be explained byinnovation in local production, suggestinga robust relationship. The Adjusted R Square, also 0.965, confirms that this model fits the data well. The standard error of the estimate (0.20943) indicates the average distance between the observed values and the predicted values, which is relatively low, further supporting the model's accuracy. The Durbin-Watson statistic of 0.546 indicates the presence of positive autocorrelation in the residuals. Since this study employed cross-sectional survey data rather than time-series data. The Durbin-Watson statistic was interpreted cautiously because it is primarily applicable to time-series regression models. Consequently, although the statistic suggests residual dependence, it does not invalidate the statistically significant relationship observed between innovation in local production and poverty alleviation.

ANOVAa

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	386.265	1	386.265	8806.369	.000[b]
	Residual	14.036	320	.044		
	Total	400.301	321			

a. Dependent Variable: Poverty alleviation
b. Predictors: (Constant), Innovation in Local production

In terms of significance, the ANOVA table shows a highly significant regression model (F = 8806.369,p<0.001),indicatingthattherelationshipbetweeninnovationinlocalproductionand poverty alleviation is not due to chance. The regression sum of squares (386.265) is much larger than the residual sum of squares (14.036), confirming the strength of the relationship.

Coefficients[a]

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
1	(Constant)	.194	.042		4.652	.000
	Innovation in Local production	.956	.010	.982	93.842	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Poverty alleviation

Examiningthecoefficientstable,theunstandardizedcoefficientforinnovationinlocalproduction is0.956,withastandarderrorof0.010.Thisindicatesthatforeveryoneunitincreaseininnovation in local production, poverty alleviation increases by 0.956 units, holding all other variables constant. The standardized coefficient (Beta = 0.982) reinforces this positive relationship, highlightingthestrongimpactofinnovationinlocalproductiononpovertyalleviation.Thet-value of 93.842 is highly significant (p < 0.001), further supporting the rejection of the null hypothesis (Ho1) that rural business innovation in local production systems has no significant effect on poverty alleviation in Ngwa, Abia State.

Based on these results, we decisively reject Ho1 and conclude that rural business innovation in local production systems significantly and positively affects poverty alleviation in Ngwa, Abia State.

Ho2: *Rural business capitalization of local resources has no significant impact on poverty alleviation in Ngwa, Abia State*.

Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.970[a]	.940	.940	.27363	.235

a. Predictors: (Constant), Capitalization of local resources
b. Dependent Variable: Poverty alleviation

The model summary indicates a strong correlation (R = 0.970) between capitalization of local resourcesandpovertyalleviation.TheRSquarevalueof0.940suggeststhatapproximately94.0% of the variance in poverty alleviation can be explained by capitalization of local resources, indicating a

robust relationship. The Adjusted R Square, also 0.940, confirms that the model fits thedata well,accountingforthecomplexityofthe model withthepredictor. Thestandarderror of theestimate(0.27363)isrelativelylow,indicatinggoodprecisioninpredictingpovertyalleviation based on capitalization of local resources. The Durbin-Watson statistic of 0.235 indicates strong positive autocorrelation among the regression residuals. However, because the present study is based on cross-sectional survey data, the Durbin-Watson statistic should be interpreted with caution. The significance of the regression coefficients and the overall model remain the primary basis for testing the hypothesis.

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	376.342	1	376.342	5026.506	.000[b]
	Residual	23.959	320	.075		
	Total	400.301	321			

a. Dependent Variable: Poverty alleviation
b. Predictors: (Constant), Capitalization of local resources

The ANOVA table shows a highly significant regression model ($F = 5026.506$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that the relationship between capitalization of local resources and povertyalleviation is statistically significant. The regression sum of squares (376.342) is much larger than the residual sum of squares (23.959), confirming the strength of the relationship.

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.235	.055		4.308	.000
	Capitalization of local resources	.935	.013	.970	70.898	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Poverty alleviation

From the coefficients table, the unstandardized coefficient for capitalization of local resources is 0.935, with a standard error of 0.013. This indicates that for every one unit increase in capitalization of local resources, poverty alleviation increases by 0.935 units, holding all other variables constant. The standardized coefficient (Beta = 0.970) reinforces this positive relationship, highlighting the strong impact of capitalization of local resources on poverty alleviation. Thet-value of 70.898 is highlysignificant ($p < 0.001$),furthersupporting the rejection of the null hypothesis (Ho2) that rural business capitalization of local resources has nosignificant impact on poverty alleviation in Ngwa, Abia State.

Based on these results, we decisivelyreject Ho2 and conclude that rural business capitalization of local resources significantly and positively affects poverty alleviation in Ngwa, Abia State.

Ho3: *Rural business employment generation has no significant effect on poverty alleviation in Ngwa, Abia State.*

Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.984[a]	.969	.969	.19811	.446

a. Predictors: (Constant), Employment generation
b. Dependent Variable: Poverty alleviation

The model exhibits a very high coefficient of determination (R^2 = 0.969), indicating that approximately 97% of the variance in poverty alleviation can be explained by variations in rural business employment generation. This strong explanatory power is further supported by the adjusted R^2, which remains high at 0.969, suggesting that the model's effectiveness in predicting poverty alleviation is robust even after accounting for the number of predictors. The Durbin–Watson statistic of **0.446** also suggests the presence of positive autocorrelation in the residuals. Given that the study utilized cross-sectional data rather than time-series observations, this statistic is interpreted as a methodological limitation rather than evidence that the regression estimates are invalid.

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	387.743	1	387.743	9879.902	.000[b]
	Residual	12.559	320	.039		
	Total	400.301	321			

a. Dependent Variable: Poverty alleviation
b. Predictors: (Constant), Employment generation

The F-statistic (9879.902) is fromthe ANOVA table was extremelyhigh, with acorresponding p-value of 0.000, indicating that the relationship observed between rural business employment generation and poverty alleviation is highly unlikely to be due to random chance. This provides strong evidence to reject the null hypothesis (Ho3) that rural business employment generation has no significant effect on poverty alleviation in Ngwa, Abia State.

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
1	(Constant)	.302	.038		7.882	.000
	Employment generation	.930	.009	.984	99.398	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Poverty alleviation

Examining the coefficient table reinforces these findings. The coefficient for employment generationis0.930,withaverylowstandarderror(0.009)andahighlysignificantt-value(99.398, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that for every unit increase in rural business employment generation, poverty alleviation in Ngwa, Abia State increases by approximately 0.930 units. This indicated that there exists a substantial between employment generation in rural entrepreneurship and poverty alleviation in the rural area of the study context.

In conclusion, based on the comprehensive analysis of the regression model, there is strong empirical support to conclude that rural business employment generation significantly affects

poverty alleviation in Ngwa, Abia State, hence the null hypothesis that states that, rural business employment generation has no significant effect on poverty alleviation in Ngwa, Abia State is rejected.

Discussion

Based on the findings from the regression analyses and empirical studies presented, it is evident that rural business strategies play a significant role in poverty alleviation in various contexts, including Ngwa, Abia State.

Firstly,theregressionanalysisrevealsthatinnovationinlocalproductionsystemshasasubstantial effecton poverty alleviation, with an R^2 of 0.965 (Mohammed & Ndulue, 2019). This indicates that innovative business models effectively create economic opportunities and enhance productivity, thereby reducing poverty levels.

Secondly, capitalization of local resources also proves to be crucial, with a regression model showing an R^2 of 0.940 (Ogundele, 2005; Chinonye & Maxwell, 2014). Utilizing local resources efficiently through entrepreneurial initiatives significantly improves economic outcomes and contributes to poverty reduction efforts.

Thirdly, rural business employment generation emerges as a key driver of poverty alleviation, supported by a high R^2 of 0.969 (Ijiwole, 2019; Jan, 2012). Creating jobs in rural areas not only lifts households out of poverty but also strengthens economic resilience and promotes sustainable development.

Conclusion

This study examined the effect of rural business strategies on poverty alleviation among smallholder farmers and agropreneurs in Isiala Ngwa South Local Government Area of Abia State, Nigeria. Based on the empirical findings, the study concludes that rural business innovation, capitalization of local resources, and employment generation each exert a positive and statistically significant effect on poverty alleviation within the study area. These findings suggest that entrepreneurial practices that promote innovation, encourage the effective utilization of locally available resources, and generate employment opportunities can improve household income, enhance economic resilience, and contribute to improved living standards among rural households.

The study further concludes that strengthening rural business activities has the potential to serve as a sustainable strategy for addressing poverty in Isiala Ngwa South Local Government Area. However, given that the study was limited to one Local Government Area in Abia State, the findings should be interpreted within this geographical context and should not be generalized to the entire Southeastern region of Nigeria without further empirical evidence. Future studies involving multiple states and Local Government Areas across the region are recommended to validate and extend these findings.

Recommendations

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

i. Local Government authorities in Isiala Ngwa South and other similar rural communities should strengthen entrepreneurship development programmes by organizing regular training and capacity-building workshops for smallholder farmers and agropreneurs. Such

programmes should focus on business innovation, enterprise management, and the adoption of improved production techniques to enhance productivity and reduce poverty.

ii. Community-based organizations, agricultural extension agencies, and business development centres should collaborate to promote the effective utilization of locally available resources through value addition, improved processing techniques, and market-oriented production. This will enable rural entrepreneurs to increase income, create employment opportunities, and improve household welfare.

iii. Local and State Government authorities should improve the business environment by providing basic infrastructure, such as accessible rural roads, electricity, and market facilities, while facilitating access to affordable credit for rural entrepreneurs. These interventions would strengthen the growth and sustainability of rural businesses within the study area.

iv. Educational institutions, community development agencies, and entrepreneurship support organizations within Abia State should encourage entrepreneurship education and practical skills acquisition through workshops, mentorship programmes, business clinics, and vocational training. These initiatives will enhance entrepreneurial competence and promote self-employment among rural residents.

v. Since this study was limited to Isiala Ngwa South Local Government Area, further studies should be conducted in other Local Government Areas and states within Southeastern Nigeria using larger and more representative samples. Such studies would provide broader empirical evidence on the contribution of rural businesses to poverty alleviation and improve the generalizability of the findings.

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