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**Schools' Social Responsibility and Rural Development in Akpabuyo Local Government Area
of Cross River State, Nigeria**

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between schools' social responsibility and rural development in Akpabuyo Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. Recognizing that educational institutions increasingly extend their responsibilities beyond classroom instruction, the study investigated how schools' social responsibility in promoting socio-economic wellbeing, demographic adjustment, and political participation influences rural development. The study adopted a survey research design in Akpabuyo Local Government Area, with a sample size of 400 respondents was determined using Taro Yamane's formula and selected through a multistage sampling procedure for the quantitative survey, while 10 school heads were purposively selected for Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), giving a total of 410 research participants. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and a Key Informant Interview guide. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation, and Chi-square statistical techniques, while qualitative data were analysed using content analysis. The findings revealed significant positive relationships between schools' social responsibility and the three dimensions of rural development examined. Specifically, schools' community-based initiatives significantly enhanced socio-economic wellbeing, facilitated demographic adjustment, and promoted political participation, thereby contributing to sustainable rural development in the study area. The study concludes that schools have evolved into strategic community development institutions whose responsibilities extend beyond formal education to encompass broader socio-economic transformation and community empowerment. It recommends strengthening partnerships among educational institutions, government agencies, and community stakeholders to institutionalize schools' social responsibility programmes as sustainable mechanisms for promoting human capital development, social cohesion, community resilience, and inclusive rural development in Nigeria.

Key words: Educational institution, corporate social responsibility, rural development, socio-economic enhancement, demographic advancement

Introduction

Rural development remains a major concern in Nigeria because many communities outside urban centres continue to experience poverty, unemployment, inadequate infrastructure, weak access to healthcare and education, and limited livelihood opportunities. At the same time, rural communities are central to national development through their contributions to agriculture, fishing, natural-resource production, food security, and labour supply. This creates a development paradox in which communities that contribute significantly to the national economy continue to face substantial socio-economic deprivation. The multidimensional nature of poverty in Nigeria further demonstrates that rural development must extend beyond income improvement to include access to education, healthcare, decent living conditions, essential services, and opportunities for meaningful participation in social and economic life (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023).

Contemporary approaches to rural development therefore emphasize human capabilities, sustainable livelihoods, institutional effectiveness, social inclusion, and community participation. Rural transformation cannot be achieved solely through the provision of physical infrastructure or agricultural inputs. It requires coordinated action by government institutions, community organizations, civil society groups, development agencies, religious bodies, and other institutions with resources and local legitimacy. The World Bank (2024) emphasizes the importance of investments in human capital, productive livelihoods, effective institutions, and inclusive development processes in improving living conditions. This broader perspective makes it necessary to examine the contributions of institutions that operate continuously within rural communities and possess resources that can be mobilized for local development.

Educational institutions are particularly relevant in this regard. Although schools are primarily established to provide formal education, their presence and institutional resources often extend beyond classroom instruction. In many rural communities, schools are among the few permanent and accessible public institutions available to residents. Their buildings may provide space for community meetings, vocational training, health campaigns, adult education, civic enlightenment,

and other development-oriented activities. Teachers and school administrators may also participate in public awareness, social mobilization, and community initiatives. Thus, school facilities, personnel, knowledge, and organizational networks can potentially contribute to wider community wellbeing and local development (UNESCO, 2021, 2022; OECD, 2023).

The concept of Schools' Social Responsibility (SSR) provides a useful framework for understanding this expanded institutional role. While conceptually related to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), SSR recognizes that schools, like other organizations, operate within social environments and affect groups beyond their immediate organizational boundaries. Schools maintain relationships with students, parents, community leaders, government agencies, civil society organizations, and development partners. Their responsibilities may therefore include activities that promote collective welfare in addition to their core mandate of teaching and learning.

For this study, Schools' Social Responsibility refers to the engagement of educational institutions in activities through which their facilities, personnel, knowledge, and organizational capacities are made available to address broader community needs. These activities may include skills acquisition, adult literacy, health education, civic enlightenment, community meetings, support for vulnerable groups, and assistance during emergencies or displacement. This does not suggest that schools should replace government or assume responsibilities beyond their institutional mandate. Rather, schools are viewed as complementary partners whose resources and local presence can strengthen existing rural development efforts.

The potential contribution of schools is particularly important in rural communities where institutional alternatives and public services may be limited. School facilities can serve as platforms for training, community dialogue, health outreach, and social mobilization, while school personnel can provide knowledge and organizational support. Through these activities, schools may contribute to socio-economic wellbeing by facilitating access to skills, information, and livelihood-related opportunities. Education is widely recognized as a critical component of human capital development because it enhances knowledge, productivity, employability, and individual

capabilities (Becker, 1993). However, the contribution of schools to economic wellbeing may extend beyond enrolled students when their facilities and personnel support vocational programmes, entrepreneurship activities, adult education, and other community-based initiatives (Federal Ministry of Education, 2022; OECD, 2023).

Another dimension of Schools' Social Responsibility concerns demographic adjustment and community resilience. Rural communities may experience population changes resulting from migration, internal displacement, communal conflict, environmental hazards, and other disruptions. Such changes create new demands for education, healthcare, housing, livelihoods, and social integration. Schools may support community adjustment by maintaining educational continuity, providing temporary access to facilities, facilitating adult learning, and creating spaces for interaction between displaced and host populations. In contexts where institutional support is weak, schools can become important sources of stability, social connection, and inclusion. Their engagement may therefore assist communities in adapting to demographic changes and strengthening resilience (IOM, 2024; NEMA, 2023; UNESCO, 2021, 2022).

Schools may also contribute indirectly to rural development through civic and political participation. Rural development depends not only on economic resources but also on citizens' ability to participate in decisions affecting their communities. School premises may be used for community meetings, voter registration and education, electoral activities, civic enlightenment, village association gatherings, and interactions between citizens and public officials. Such activities can promote political awareness, strengthen community dialogue, facilitate collective action, and provide opportunities for residents to communicate local needs to decision-makers. Given the relationship between education, democratic citizenship, and civic competence, schools can serve as important spaces for supporting political and civic engagement (UNESCO, 2023; INEC, 2023).

The relevance of these functions is consistent with the Sustainable Development Goals, which recognize the interconnectedness of poverty reduction, education, health, employment, sustainable communities, social inclusion, and effective institutions (United Nations, 2024). Schools have

potential links with several of these development objectives through human-capital formation, health awareness, livelihood support, social inclusion, and civic participation. Rural development should therefore be understood as a multidimensional process involving improvements in material wellbeing, expansion of human capabilities, strengthening of social relationships, and increased opportunities for participation. This perspective is particularly relevant to Nigeria, where rural communities continue to confront interconnected challenges involving poverty, unemployment, weak infrastructure, limited healthcare, inadequate water supply, environmental pressures, and institutional deficits (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023).

These challenges make it difficult for government interventions alone to satisfy all local development needs. Effective rural transformation consequently requires collaboration among government, communities, schools, civil society organizations, and development agencies. Schools are potentially valuable partners because they combine physical facilities, human resources, institutional legitimacy, and established relationships with local households. This is particularly relevant to Akpabuyo Local Government Area of Cross River State, where livelihoods are closely associated with agriculture, fishing, and other natural-resource-based activities. Like many rural areas, the locality faces socio-economic and infrastructural challenges, limited access to essential services, environmental pressures, and population movements arising from social disruptions. These conditions require coordinated interventions involving institutions that understand local realities and can connect residents with available opportunities and resources.

Despite increasing recognition of education as an instrument of social and community development, the wider social responsibilities of schools remain relatively underexplored in Nigerian rural research. Existing studies have largely focused on schools' conventional functions of teaching, learning, and human-capital development, while research on organizational social responsibility has predominantly examined business organizations. Comparatively limited attention has been given to how schools utilize their infrastructure, personnel, knowledge, and community networks to address local development challenges. This gap is particularly significant in rural settings where schools may represent some of the most accessible and enduring

institutional resources available to residents. Against this background, the present study examines the relationship between Schools' Social Responsibility and rural development in Akpabuyo Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria.

Concept of School Social Responsibility

School Social Responsibility (SSR) refers to the application of the broader principles of social responsibility to educational institutions. It describes the deliberate efforts of schools to respond to the needs of the communities in which they operate, extending their contribution beyond formal teaching and learning to activities that promote social welfare, economic advancement, civic participation, environmental sustainability, and community development. The concept recognizes that schools are not isolated institutions but integral components of the communities they serve (UNESCO, 2021). Although the primary mandate of schools is education and human-capital development, their institutional responsibilities increasingly include community engagement, health promotion, environmental awareness, civic education, social inclusion, and collaboration with local stakeholders (OECD, 2023).

The concept of SSR is based on the recognition that schools possess physical, human, informational, and organizational resources that can be mobilized for wider community benefit. School facilities, professional expertise, institutional networks, and relationships with local stakeholders can support activities such as community meetings, adult literacy, vocational training, health campaigns, civic education, conflict mediation, and emergency responses (UNESCO, 2022). This role is particularly important in rural communities where schools may be among the few permanent and accessible public institutions. In such contexts, schools can function as shared community resources and institutional bridges connecting residents with government agencies, non-governmental organizations, development partners, and other service providers.

SSR also reflects a broader shift in understanding the social purpose of education. Educational institutions are increasingly expected to apply their knowledge, infrastructure, and institutional capacities to address societal challenges. This orientation is evident in the "Third Mission" of universities, which emphasizes knowledge exchange, regional development, innovation, and

engagement with external stakeholders (Benneworth et al., 2018). Although the Third Mission is primarily associated with higher education, its underlying principle is applicable to schools because it highlights the responsibility of educational institutions to contribute to the social and economic wellbeing of their surrounding communities.

The importance of SSR becomes more pronounced in rural settings characterized by inadequate infrastructure and limited access to essential services. School premises may provide space for health outreach, vocational training, electoral activities, community meetings, emergency assistance, and other development programmes. Schools can therefore serve as institutional bridges through which development interventions reach local populations (OECD, 2023). This is particularly relevant in Nigeria, where many rural communities continue to experience deficits in healthcare, potable water, electricity, employment opportunities, and other social infrastructure. By making their facilities available and participating in literacy programmes, health campaigns, social mobilization, and skills-development initiatives, schools can complement government efforts and contribute to local development (Federal Ministry of Education, 2022).

Schools' Social Responsibility and Socio-economic Wellbeing

Socio-economic wellbeing refers to the conditions that enable individuals and households to live healthy, productive, secure, and socially integrated lives. It encompasses income and livelihood opportunities, education, healthcare, employment, social inclusion, and overall quality of life (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2024). Schools can influence these outcomes through their core educational functions as well as through community-oriented activities that address the socio-economic needs of local populations.

The human capital perspective provides an important basis for understanding this relationship. Becker (1993) argues that investment in education and skills enhances productivity, employability, earnings, and economic development. From an SSR perspective, however, the contribution of schools to human-capital formation extends beyond enrolled students. Schools can provide opportunities for adults, young people, women, and other community members to acquire practical knowledge and skills. Programmes in vocational training, entrepreneurship, agricultural education,

health awareness, financial literacy, and digital skills can strengthen household capabilities and improve residents' capacity to pursue sustainable livelihoods.

This broader community-development role is particularly significant in rural areas where formal employment opportunities are often limited and many households depend on informal economic activities. Skills training in areas such as tailoring, information and communication technology, soap production, agro-processing, and financial management can equip residents with competencies for self-employment and income generation (UNESCO, 2022). By providing access to knowledge, skills, and institutional facilities, schools may help strengthen local livelihoods, improve household resilience, and reduce socio-economic vulnerability.

Educational institutions can thus serve as platforms for innovation, partnership development, youth empowerment, and community capacity building (OECD, 2023). The benefits of these activities may extend beyond individual participants by strengthening social networks, collective action, and local institutional capacity. In rural Nigeria, SSR therefore has the potential to complement government programmes aimed at improving livelihoods and social welfare. When schools provide their facilities for community development initiatives or participate in programmes that enhance skills, health knowledge, entrepreneurship, and social awareness, they contribute to the broader socio-economic wellbeing of their host communities. Their distinctive value lies in their ability to combine educational resources, professional expertise, physical infrastructure, and established community relationships. Through these capacities, schools can help connect underserved populations to development opportunities and support systems that may otherwise remain inaccessible (Federal Ministry of Education, 2022).

Consequently, School Social Responsibility should be understood not as a replacement for government responsibility but as a complementary institutional contribution to community development. By extending their resources and expertise beyond conventional classroom functions, schools can support human-capital development, livelihood improvement, social inclusion, and community capacity building. In rural communities, where institutional resources

are often scarce, such engagement may be particularly valuable in strengthening socio-economic wellbeing and advancing broader rural development outcomes.

Schools' Social Responsibility and Demographic Adjustment

Demographic adjustment refers to the capacity of communities to respond effectively to changes in population size, composition, and distribution arising from migration, displacement, urbanization, natural disasters, and conflict. Effective adjustment involves not only accommodating changing populations but also maintaining social relationships, ensuring access to essential services, promoting inclusion, and preserving community stability (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2024). Schools can contribute to this process because they possess physical facilities, institutional structures, professional personnel, and established relationships with households and community organizations.

During crises and population displacement, school facilities may be used temporarily for accommodation, humanitarian assistance, relief distribution, healthcare interventions, vaccination programmes, and emergency coordination (UNESCO, 2022). Such uses demonstrate the flexibility of schools as community institutions, particularly when conventional social infrastructure is overwhelmed. Beyond emergency support, schools can promote continuity and stability by maintaining educational activities and creating opportunities for displaced populations to reconnect with social institutions. Schools can also facilitate interaction between displaced populations and host communities. Shared educational and community activities create opportunities for social contact, cooperation, and mutual understanding, thereby reducing exclusion and strengthening social cohesion. Education can provide displaced populations with pathways to reconnect with social institutions and rebuild stability, while schools can serve as entry points for integrating displaced children and families into community life (UNHCR, 2024). In rural Nigeria, where population movements may result from communal conflict, flooding, environmental pressures, and other disruptions, schools can support literacy, civic education, skills acquisition, and other activities that help displaced persons adapt to new circumstances (NEMA, 2023).

The demographic dimension of School Social Responsibility therefore involves the capacity of educational institutions to support communities experiencing population change and social disruption. By providing accessible facilities, maintaining educational continuity, facilitating interaction between displaced and host populations, and connecting vulnerable groups to relevant services, schools can contribute to community resilience and social stability. This role aligns with UNESCO's (2021) emphasis on education as a mechanism for strengthening inclusion, social cohesion, and collective resilience. Schools' contribution to demographic adjustment thus represents an important dimension of their broader responsibility to the communities in which they operate.

Schools' Social Responsibility and Political Participation

Political participation refers to the ways individuals and groups engage in public affairs and influence decisions affecting their lives and communities. It includes voting, civic education, public discussions, community meetings, advocacy, consultations, and involvement in democratic decision-making (World Bank, 2024). Schools occupy an important position within this process because they contribute to the development of citizenship knowledge, democratic values, civic responsibility, and collective action. Their role in political participation can therefore extend beyond classroom instruction to providing spaces and opportunities for wider community engagement in civic and democratic activities.

Schools can facilitate political participation by providing accessible venues for voter registration, civic enlightenment, electoral activities, public consultations, community meetings, and dialogue among stakeholders. Such activities can increase citizens' awareness of public issues and strengthen interaction between communities and governance institutions. Education contributes to democratic citizenship, while educational institutions can connect local populations with government agencies, civil society organizations, and other development actors (UNESCO, 2023; OECD, 2023). These interactions may improve communication between citizens and authorities,

promote accountability, and encourage greater involvement in decisions affecting community development.

This role is particularly relevant in rural communities, where schools may be among the few accessible institutional spaces capable of accommodating large gatherings. In Nigeria, school premises are sometimes used for voter registration and education, civic sensitization, public enlightenment, community consultations, and other participatory activities involving electoral bodies, community associations, political organizations, and civil society groups (INEC, 2023). When appropriately managed and consistent with educational priorities, such uses can broaden opportunities for civic engagement and strengthen community interaction.

The political dimension of School Social Responsibility also extends beyond electoral activities. Through community meetings, civic programmes, leadership activities, and public dialogue, schools can provide platforms for residents to deliberate on common challenges and develop collective responses. Such engagements may encourage peaceful conflict resolution, strengthen community consultation, promote leadership development, and improve participation in local decision-making (Campbell, 2022).

Rural Development

Rural development is a multidimensional process aimed at improving the economic, social, political, environmental, and institutional conditions of people living in rural communities. It involves expanding livelihood opportunities, strengthening human capabilities, improving access to essential services, developing infrastructure, promoting effective governance, and enabling rural populations to participate meaningfully in decisions that affect their lives. Contemporary perspectives have therefore moved beyond a narrow focus on agricultural production to incorporate education, healthcare, employment, infrastructure, environmental sustainability, gender equality, social inclusion, and institutional effectiveness (World Bank, 2024; United Nations, 2024).

This broader perspective recognizes that rural wellbeing is shaped by the interaction of several interconnected dimensions. Education strengthens human capital and improves opportunities for employment and productivity; healthcare enhances wellbeing and productive capacity; infrastructure supports economic and social activities; while effective institutions promote participation, accountability, and social inclusion. The Sustainable Development Goals reflect these interconnections by linking poverty reduction, health, quality education, water and sanitation, decent employment, sustainable communities, and inclusive institutions (United Nations, 2024). In Nigeria, rural development continues to face significant challenges, including poverty, unemployment, inadequate infrastructure, environmental pressures, limited institutional capacity, and unequal access to essential social services (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). These challenges underscore the importance of accessible local institutions that can complement government efforts and mobilize community resources. Schools are particularly relevant because they possess physical facilities, human resources, organizational capacities, and established relationships with households and community groups. Through activities such as skills development, health promotion, civic engagement, community meetings, and social integration, schools may contribute to broader rural development processes. Within this study, rural development is conceptualized as a multidimensional outcome reflected in improved socio-economic wellbeing, effective adjustment to demographic changes, and meaningful participation in political and civic activities.

Theoretical Framework: Stakeholder Theory

This study is anchored on Stakeholder Theory, developed by Freeman (1984). The theory challenges the narrow view that organizations should focus exclusively on their immediate organizational interests and emphasizes the importance of considering the legitimate interests of individuals and groups who affect or are affected by organizational activities. These stakeholders may include employees, clients, government institutions, communities, civil society organizations, and the wider public. The central proposition is that organizations can create sustainable value

when they recognize and respond appropriately to the interests of the various stakeholders connected to their activities.

Applied to education, Stakeholder Theory provides a useful framework for understanding schools as institutions whose responsibilities extend beyond classroom teaching. Schools operate within communities and maintain relationships with students, parents, government agencies, community leaders, civil society organizations, and development partners. Their activities therefore have implications for the wider social environment in which they are located. From this perspective, schools have a responsibility, within the limits of their institutional capacities, to contribute to the welfare and development of their host communities.

The relevance of the theory to this study lies in its direct connection to the three dimensions of School Social Responsibility examined: socio-economic wellbeing, demographic adjustment, and political participation. When schools provide facilities for skills acquisition, health programmes, adult education, or community development activities, they respond to the socio-economic needs of local residents. When their facilities and personnel support displaced persons and vulnerable populations, they contribute to demographic adjustment, social inclusion, and community resilience. Similarly, when schools provide appropriate spaces for civic education, voter registration, community meetings, and other legitimate participatory activities, they facilitate citizens' engagement with governance and democratic processes.

Stakeholder Theory therefore positions schools as community partners rather than isolated educational institutions. It emphasizes that their developmental contribution emerges through relationships, shared responsibilities, and collaboration among schools, government, parents, community organizations, civil society groups, and other local actors. The theory is consequently appropriate for explaining how Schools' Social Responsibility may contribute to rural development by addressing the interconnected socio-economic, demographic, civic, and institutional needs of communities. It provides the theoretical basis for examining whether and how the social responsibilities undertaken by schools are associated with rural development outcomes in Akpabuyo Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The study sought to achieve the following objectives:

- i. To determine the relationship between schools' social responsibility in promoting socio-economic wellbeing and rural development in Akpabuyo Local Government Area of Cross River State.
- ii. To investigate the association between schools' social responsibility in facilitating demographic adjustment and rural development in Akpabuyo Local Government Area of Cross River State.
- iii. To examine the relationship between schools' social responsibility in providing a conducive environment for political activities and rural development in Akpabuyo Local Government Area of Cross River State.

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

- i. Schools' social responsibility in promoting socio-economic wellbeing has no significant relationship with rural development in Akpabuyo Local Government Area of Cross River State.
- ii. Schools' social responsibility in facilitating demographic adjustment has no significant association with rural development in Akpabuyo Local Government Area of Cross River State.
- iii. Schools' social responsibility in providing a conducive environment for political activities has no significant relationship with rural development in Akpabuyo Local Government Area of Cross River State.

Research Methods

The study adopted a survey research design with an inferential orientation. This design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to collect quantitative information from adult residents across selected communities and statistically examine the relationships between schools' social responsibility and rural development.

Study Area

The study was conducted in Akpabuyo Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria, covering approximately 871.9 km² and sharing an international boundary with Cameroon. It is bordered by Akamkpa Local Government Area to the north and Calabar Municipality to the east and is administratively divided into ten political wards. Despite its natural resources, the area faces persistent developmental challenges, including poverty, unemployment, inadequate potable water, limited educational opportunities, weak healthcare services, hunger, and malnutrition.

Study Population

The population of the study comprised adult residents of the various communities in Akpabuyo Local Government Area. The population estimate used for the study was 479,978 persons, based on the official population projection available to the researcher for 2024 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2024). The target population included adult males and females engaged in diverse livelihood and occupational activities, including farming, fishing, trading, entrepreneurship, civil service, artisanal work, and unemployment.

Sample Size Determination

The sample size for the quantitative component of the study was determined using the **Taro Yamane (1967) formula** for finite populations. The formula is stated as:

$$[n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}]$$

Where:

- n = required sample size;
- N = total population size;
- e = level of precision.

Using a population of 479,978 and a precision level of 0.05:

$$[n = \frac{479,978}{1 + 479,978(0.05)^2}]$$

$$[n = 399.67 \approx 400]$$

Accordingly, 400 respondents were selected for the administration of the questionnaire. In addition, 10 school heads were purposively selected as key informants for the qualitative

component because of their knowledge of school-community relations and direct involvement in community-oriented school activities. The total number of study participants was therefore 410, comprising 400 questionnaire respondents and 10 key informants.

Sampling Procedure

A multistage sampling procedure was employed to select participants for the study. The first stage involved the use of the 10 political wards in Akpabuyo Local Government Area as the primary sampling strata, thereby ensuring that the geographical spread of the Local Government Area was reflected in the study. In the second stage, two communities were selected from each ward through simple random sampling, producing a total of 20 communities for the quantitative survey.

At the third stage, eligible adult residents were selected from the sampled communities using a systematic sampling technique based on available lists or sampling frames of adult residents. The 400 questionnaire respondents were distributed across the selected communities to provide broad geographical coverage and representation of the target population. Respondents were drawn from different livelihood and occupational categories, including farmers, fishermen, traders, entrepreneurs, civil servants, artisans, and unemployed persons. For the qualitative component, 10 school heads were purposively selected for Key Informant Interviews. Their selection was based on their institutional positions, experience, and direct knowledge of school-community relationships and development activities.

Results

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of Respondents (N = 400)

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex		
Male	240	60.0
Female	160	40.0
Total	400	100
Age		
18-25 years	62	15.5
26-33 years	68	17.0
34-41 years	86	21.5
42 years and above	184	46.0
Total	400	100
Marital Status		

Single	106	26.5
Married	268	67.0
Separated/Divorced	8	2.0
Widow/Widower	18	4.5
Total	400	100
Livelihood Source		
Trading	114	28.5
Civil service	46	11.5
Farming	122	30.5
Artisan work	26	6.5
Fishing	92	23.0
Total	400	100
Educational Status		
FSLC	50	12.5
SSCE	154	38.5
OND/NCE	88	22.0
B.SC/B.A/B.ED/HND	92	23.0
M.SC/MBA.M.ED	12	3.0
Ph.D	4	1.0
Total	400	100
Religious Affiliation		
Christianity	368	92.0
Islam	6	1.5
Traditional Religion	24	6.0
None	2	0.5
Total	400	100
Current Employment Status		
Employed	44	11.0
Unemployed	186	46.5
Self-employed	144	36.0
Contract staff	12	3.0
Retired	14	3.5
Total	400	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The socio-demographic profile shows that males constituted the larger proportion of respondents (60.0%), while females accounted for 40.0%. Respondents aged 42 years and above represented the largest age group (46.0%), suggesting that a substantial proportion of participants were mature adults with considerable experience of community affairs. Married respondents constituted 67.0% of the sample, indicating that the majority were living within established family structures. In terms of livelihood, farming accounted for the largest proportion of respondents (30.5%), followed by trading (28.5%) and fishing (23.0%), reflecting the predominantly agrarian and coastal livelihood context of Akpabuyo. Educationally, SSCE holders constituted the largest group (38.5%), while 23.0% possessed university or equivalent qualifications. Christianity was the

dominant religious affiliation, accounting for 92.0% of respondents. With respect to employment, unemployment was highest at 46.5%, followed by self-employment at 36.0%. This employment profile reflects the socio-economic vulnerabilities experienced by many residents and provides important context for understanding the potential contribution of schools to local skills development, livelihood support, and rural wellbeing.

Schools' Social Responsibility for Socio-economic Wellbeing and Rural Development**Table 2: Schools' Social Responsibility for Socio-economic Wellbeing and Rural Development (N = 400)**

S/N	Items	Positive (Yes)	Negative (No)
8	Schools engage village members in school projects.	355 (88.8%)	45 (11.2%)
9	The school provides space for community members to develop their skills.	394 (98.5%)	6 (1.5%)
10	The school serves as a community civic arena.	387 (96.8%)	13 (3.3%)
11	The community borehole was provided by the school.	374 (93.5%)	26 (6.5%)
12	Resource persons use school premises to train villagers in soap making, weaving, cane-chair production, and related skills.	389 (97.3%)	11 (2.8%)
13	The school provides space for community health workers' activities.	391 (97.8%)	9 (2.3%)

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

The results indicate a high level of community recognition of schools' contributions to socio-economic wellbeing. Almost all respondents (98.5%) affirmed that schools provide space for community members to develop skills, while 97.3% reported that resource persons use school premises for practical training in activities such as soap making, weaving, and cane-chair production. Similarly, 97.8% acknowledged the use of school facilities for community health activities, and 93.5% indicated that the school contributed to the provision of a community borehole. Furthermore, 88.8% confirmed that schools engage village members in school projects. Overall, the findings suggest that schools in Akpabuyo perform functions that extend beyond formal education. Their facilities serve as platforms for skills acquisition, community health activities, civic engagement, and local infrastructure development. These activities provide evidence of an active relationship between schools and their host communities and indicate that

schools constitute potentially important institutional resources for promoting rural socio-economic development.

Schools' Social Responsibility for Demographic Adjustment and Rural Wellbeing

Table 3: Community Assessment of Schools' Social Responsibility for Demographic Adjustment and Rural Wellbeing (N = 400)

S/N	Indicators	Positive (Yes)	Negative (No)
14	The school provides temporary accommodation for people displaced from their communities of origin.	254 (63.5%)	146 (36.5%)
15	The school serves as a venue for adult education programmes.	315 (78.8%)	85 (21.2%)
16	The school offers extra-mural academic support to children preparing for external examinations.	298 (74.5%)	102 (25.5%)
17	Permitting migrants to use part of the school premises contributes to increased economic and political activities within the surrounding community.	275 (68.8%)	125 (31.2%)
18	School facilities are now benefiting more people from outside the immediate community than in the past.	322 (80.5%)	78 (19.5%)
19	The school has contributed to improved community wellbeing through enhanced livelihood opportunities, literacy, and health conditions.	345 (86.3%)	55 (13.7%)

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

The results in Table 3 indicate that schools play several roles in helping communities respond to demographic changes and associated social challenges. A substantial proportion of respondents (63.5%) reported that schools provide temporary accommodation for displaced persons, while 78.8% identified schools as venues for adult education. Similarly, 74.5% acknowledged the provision of extra-mural academic support for children preparing for external examinations. The results further show that 68.8% of respondents believed that allowing migrants to use portions of school premises contributes to increased economic and political activities within the surrounding communities. The findings also indicate that the reach of school facilities extends beyond immediate school populations. About 80.5% of respondents reported that people from outside the immediate community increasingly benefit from available school facilities. Most notably, 86.3% agreed that schools have contributed to improved wellbeing by strengthening income-generating opportunities, literacy, and health conditions. Overall, the results suggest that schools function as

flexible community institutions that can support displaced populations, adult learning, educational continuity, and broader social and economic integration.

Schools' Social Responsibility for Political Activities and Rural Wellbeing

Table 4: Community Assessment of Schools' Social Responsibility for Political Activities and Rural Wellbeing (N = 400)

S/N	Indicators	Positive (Yes)	Negative (No)
20	Political parties use school premises for meetings and campaign-related activities.	254 (63.5%)	146 (36.5%)
21	Village union meetings and community interactions are held within school premises.	315 (78.8%)	85 (21.2%)
22	School grounds are sometimes used to resolve disputes involving the local community and neighbouring communities.	298 (74.5%)	102 (25.5%)
23	Election campaigns and voter registration activities are conducted at the village school.	275 (68.8%)	125 (31.2%)
24	Non-governmental organizations conduct public enlightenment programmes within the school environment.	322 (80.5%)	78 (19.5%)
25	Schools provide spaces where villagers can assemble, deliberate, and respond collectively to local government decisions affecting their communities.	345 (86.3%)	55 (13.7%)

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

Table 4 shows that schools constitute important spaces for civic interaction and community-level political engagement. While 63.5% of respondents confirmed that political parties hold meetings or conduct campaign activities on school premises, a larger proportion (78.8%) reported that village union meetings and other community interactions take place within schools. Furthermore, 74.5% indicated that school grounds are used to address disputes involving the community and neighbouring communities, suggesting that school facilities can serve as neutral and accessible spaces for dialogue and conflict resolution. The results also show that 68.8% of respondents identified schools as venues for electoral campaigns and voter registration, while 80.5% reported that NGOs conduct enlightenment programmes within school premises. The highest positive response (86.3%) was recorded for the use of schools as spaces where community members assemble, deliberate, and collectively respond to local government decisions. These findings suggest that schools contribute to rural wellbeing by creating accessible institutional spaces for civic interaction, collective deliberation, community mobilization, and political participation.

Rural Wellbeing Outcomes

Table 5: Respondents' Assessment of Rural Wellbeing Outcomes (N = 400)

S/N	Indicators of Rural Wellbeing	Positive (Yes)	Negative (No)
26	Improvement in shelter and nutritional conditions.	376 (94.0%)	24 (6.0%)
27	Increased political awareness and participation.	383 (95.8%)	17 (4.3%)
28	Greater participation in community activities.	296 (74.0%)	104 (26.0%)
29	Improvement in health and literacy conditions.	285 (71.3%)	115 (28.7%)
30	Improved personal safety and reduced fear of physical harm.	314 (78.5%)	86 (21.5%)
31	Expansion of income-generating opportunities.	278 (69.5%)	122 (30.5%)

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

The results presented in Table 5 indicate generally positive perceptions of rural wellbeing among respondents. The highest proportion (95.8%) reported increased political awareness and participation, while 94.0% indicated improvement in shelter and nutritional conditions. In addition, 78.5% perceived improvements in personal safety and a reduction in fear of physical harm, while 74.0% reported greater participation in community life.

However, the relatively lower proportions recorded for improved health and literacy conditions (71.3%) and increased income-generating opportunities (69.5%) suggest that important challenges remain in these areas. The findings therefore indicate that while respondents perceive positive changes in several dimensions of rural wellbeing, economic opportunities and access to improved health and literacy conditions require continued attention.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One

H₀₁: Schools' social responsibility in promoting socio-economic wellbeing has no significant relationship with rural development in Akpabuyo Local Government Area. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation analysis was used to test the hypothesis because the objective was to determine the direction and strength of the association between the identified dimensions of schools' social responsibility and rural development.

Table 6: Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Analysis of the Relationship between Schools' Social Responsibility for Socio-economic Wellbeing and Rural Development (N = 400)

Variables	ΣX	ΣY	ΣX^2	ΣY^2	ΣXY	r-cal
School Social Responsibility						
a. Village members' participation in school projects (X_1)	2675	1865	1775			0.781
b. Community borehole provided by the school (X_2)	1655	1950	1650			0.643
c. School premises used as skills development centre (X_3)	1240	1645	1540			0.869
d. School provides space for community health activities (X_4)	1126	1742	1654			0.754
Rural Development (Y)	950	1650				
Significant	at	0.05;	df	=	398;	critical-r
Source:						= 0.195.

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

The results indicate positive and statistically significant relationships between each of the four dimensions of schools' social responsibility and rural development. The obtained correlation coefficients range from $r = 0.643$ to $r = 0.869$, all of which exceed the critical value of 0.195 at 0.05 significance level. The strongest association is observed between the use of school premises as skills-development centres and rural development ($r = 0.869$). This is followed by community participation in school projects ($r = 0.781$) and the provision of space for community health activities ($r = 0.754$). The provision of community boreholes records the lowest coefficient ($r = 0.643$), although the relationship remains statistically significant. Since all calculated r -values exceed the critical value, the null hypothesis is rejected. The result implies that schools' social responsibility in promoting socio-economic wellbeing is significantly associated with rural development in Akpabuyo Local Government Area.

Hypothesis Two

H₀₂: Schools' social responsibility in facilitating demographic adjustment has no significant association with rural development in Akpabuyo Local Government Area. A Pearson chi-square test of independence was employed to examine the association between schools' social responsibility for demographic adjustment and rural development.

Table 7: Chi-Square Analysis of Schools' Social Responsibility for Demographic Adjustment and Rural Development (N = 400)

Schools' Demographic Adjustment	Social Responsibility for Positive Development	Rural Negative Development	Rural Row Total
High provision of demographic adjustment services	198 (163.75)	52 (86.25)	250
Low provision of demographic adjustment services	64 (98.25)	86 (51.75)	150
Column Total	262	138	400

Note: Figures in parentheses represent expected frequencies. $\chi^2(1) = 55.37$; $\chi^2_{critical} = 3.84$; $\alpha = 0.05$.

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

The chi-square result indicates a statistically significant association between schools' social responsibility for demographic adjustment and rural development, $\chi^2(1, N = 400) = 55.37, p < 0.05$. Respondents who reported a high level of school involvement in demographic adjustment were more likely to report positive rural development outcomes than respondents who reported low levels of such involvement. Since the calculated chi-square value of 55.37 is substantially higher than the critical value of 3.84, the null hypothesis is rejected. The result therefore indicates that schools' social responsibility in facilitating demographic adjustment is significantly associated with rural development in Akpabuyo Local Government Area.

Hypothesis Three

H₀₃: Schools' social responsibility in providing a conducive environment for political activities has no significant relationship with rural development in Akpabuyo Local Government Area.

Table 8: Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Analysis of the Relationship between Schools' Social Responsibility for Political Activities and Rural Development (N = 400)

Variables	$\sum X$	$\sum Y$	$\sum X^2$	$\sum Y^2$	$\sum XY$	r-cal
School Social Responsibility						
a. Political party meetings/campaigns (X_1)	2675	1865	1775			0.812
b. Village union interactions (X_2)	1655	1950	1650			0.514
c. Voter registration activities (X_3)	1240	1645	1540			0.564
d. NGO enlightenment activities (X_4)	1126	1742	1654			0.810
Rural Development (Y)	950	1650				
Significant at 0.05;	critical-r	=	0.195;	df	=	398.

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

The results show that all four dimensions of schools' social responsibility for political activities have positive relationships with rural development. The correlation coefficients range from $r = 0.514$ to $r = 0.812$, exceeding the critical value of 0.195 at the 0.05 significance level. The strongest relationship is associated with political party meetings and campaigns ($r = 0.812$), closely followed by NGO enlightenment activities ($r = 0.810$). Village union interactions ($r = 0.514^*$) and voter registration activities ($r = 0.564^*$) also demonstrate significant positive relationships with rural development. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected. The result indicates that schools' social responsibility in providing conducive spaces for political and civic activities is significantly related to rural development in Akpabuyo Local Government Area. The finding suggests that school facilities serve as important community spaces for civic interaction, political awareness, public enlightenment, collective deliberation, and local participation.

Discussion

Schools' Social Responsibility, Socio-economic Wellbeing and Rural Development

The findings demonstrate that schools' engagement in activities aimed at improving socio-economic wellbeing is significantly and positively related to rural development in Akpabuyo Local Government Area. The evidence from the correlation analysis indicates that community participation in school development projects, school involvement in the provision of boreholes, the availability of school premises for skills acquisition, and the use of school facilities for community health interventions all contribute positively to rural development outcomes. This pattern of results suggests that the developmental relevance of schools in rural communities is not confined to classroom instruction or the academic advancement of pupils. Rather, schools function as community-based institutions whose physical facilities, human resources, and organizational networks can be mobilized to respond to broader social and economic needs.

The significance of this finding becomes clearer when viewed against the structural challenges confronting many rural communities. In settings characterized by inadequate infrastructure, restricted employment opportunities, limited access to potable water, and weak health-service

provision, schools may provide an important institutional platform for addressing some of these deficiencies. For example, the use of school premises for skills acquisition programmes creates opportunities for community members to develop practical competencies that may improve their employability and capacity for self-employment. In the same way, school-supported water projects can reduce the burden associated with inadequate access to safe water, while health-related activities conducted within school environments can extend preventive and public health services to populations that might otherwise have limited access to such interventions.

The qualitative evidence obtained from the Key Informant Interviews provides further insight into the mechanisms underlying this relationship. One respondent explained that a community borehole was initially promoted by the school and subsequently completed through collaborative efforts involving both the school and the wider community. Similarly, the construction of teachers' quarters was reportedly supported by the Parent-Teacher Association. School infrastructure can therefore become a shared community resource, while parents, community members, civil society organizations, and public institutions contribute to projects that simultaneously strengthen the school and the wider locality.

The finding can be situated within Becker's (1993) Human Capital Theory, which regards investments in education, knowledge, and skills as essential to improving individual productivity and broader socio-economic outcomes. From this perspective, the contribution of schools to rural development extends beyond the formal transmission of academic knowledge. When schools facilitate skills training, community learning, health education, and access to basic infrastructure, they contribute to the accumulation of human and social capabilities that can improve the capacity of individuals and communities to address developmental challenges. The finding is also compatible with the emphasis placed by UNESCO (2022) and the OECD (2023) on the evolving role of educational institutions in community engagement, local innovation, skills development, and capacity strengthening. Similarly, the Federal Ministry of Education (2022) recognizes the potential of schools to support literacy, community mobilization, and wider social development objectives.

However, the finding also points to the need for stronger institutional partnerships and deliberate policy frameworks that can enable schools to undertake these wider responsibilities without compromising their primary educational mandate.

Schools' Social Responsibility, Demographic Adjustment and Rural Development

The second major finding indicates a statistically significant relationship between schools' social responsibility in facilitating demographic adjustment and rural development in Akpabuyo Local Government Area. The chi-square analysis suggests that communities where schools contribute to temporary accommodation, make their facilities available to vulnerable populations, and support the integration of displaced persons are more likely to record favourable rural development outcomes. This result highlights an often-overlooked dimension of the social responsibility of educational institutions: their capacity to serve as stabilizing institutions during periods of population movement, displacement, and social disruption.

Rural communities experiencing migration, communal tensions, displacement, or other demographic disturbances often face significant pressure on already limited social infrastructure. In such circumstances, schools may provide a degree of institutional flexibility that enables communities to respond to emerging needs. Classrooms, halls, and other school facilities can sometimes be temporarily utilized to accommodate displaced populations or support humanitarian interventions. More importantly, schools provide spaces where displaced individuals, host communities, government agencies, and civil society organizations can interact. Such interactions may facilitate social adjustment and reduce the risk of marginalization among vulnerable groups.

The importance of this role goes beyond the provision of physical space. By allowing displaced or newly arrived populations to access community resources and participate in social activities, schools may contribute to the rebuilding of social relationships and trust. Educational environments can also create opportunities for interaction between host and displaced populations, thereby reducing social distance and encouraging a sense of belonging.

The findings are broadly consistent with the position of UNESCO (2021, 2022), which identifies schools as important institutions for maintaining educational continuity, promoting social cohesion, responding to emergencies, and strengthening community resilience. They also correspond with IOM (2024), which emphasizes the importance of institutional arrangements that facilitate social integration and adaptation in contexts affected by migration and population mobility. Similarly, NEMA (2023) underscores the need for coordinated institutional responses to displacement and humanitarian emergencies. Evidence from the Key Informant Interviews further reinforces these arguments, as respondents indicated that schools in Akpabuyo have, at different times, provided accommodation for displaced persons and supported activities that enabled vulnerable populations to participate in community life and local economic activities.

Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984) offers a useful lens for understanding this finding. The theory emphasizes that institutions have responsibilities to a broad network of stakeholders whose interests are affected by their activities. From this perspective, the responsibilities of schools extend beyond students and teachers to include parents, host communities, displaced persons, government institutions, community associations, and other social actors.

Overall, the evidence from Akpabuyo indicates that schools can function as important social anchors during periods of demographic change. Their contribution to rural development is therefore multidimensional: they educate, build human capabilities, facilitate access to community resources, support social integration, and provide institutional stability in times of disruption. This broader understanding of schools' social responsibility calls for a more deliberate approach to school-community partnerships in which educational institutions are integrated into local development planning while receiving appropriate institutional support to perform these additional functions effectively.

Schools' Social Responsibility, Political Activities and Rural Development

The third finding reveals a significant positive relationship between schools' social responsibility in providing spaces for political and civic activities and rural development in Akpabuyo Local

Government Area. The correlation analysis indicates that the use of school environments for political party meetings and campaigns, village union engagements, voter registration activities, and non-governmental organization (NGO) enlightenment programmes is positively associated with rural development.

The findings point to the potential contribution of schools to the development of local social capital. When school premises facilitate village union meetings, civic enlightenment programmes, and community discussions, they create opportunities for relationships and networks to be established or reinforced among different groups within the community. These networks can enhance the flow of information, facilitate collective problem-solving, and support coordinated responses to local challenges.

This interpretation is consistent with UNESCO's (2023) emphasis on the role of educational institutions in fostering citizenship, democratic values, and meaningful civic participation. It also corresponds with the OECD's (2023) view of educational institutions as important points of connection between communities, public authorities, and civil society. Within Nigeria's electoral environment, the finding is similarly relevant to the activities of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), particularly in relation to voter education, public sensitization, and electoral participation (INEC, 2023). Campbell (2022) further highlights the capacity of schools to support community consultations, leadership development, peaceful conflict management, and participatory decision-making. The qualitative evidence generated in the present study reinforces these perspectives, as respondents identified schools in Akpabuyo as important venues for community meetings, civic enlightenment, and discussions relating to local development.

However, the findings should not be interpreted as suggesting that schools should become partisan political institutions. Rather, their contribution to rural development is more appropriately understood in terms of their capacity to provide inclusive and properly regulated civic spaces.

The findings therefore lend further support to the argument of Nkpoyen et al. (2021) that rural schools are increasingly involved in community development activities that transcend their conventional educational mandate. They also resonate with the stakeholder perspective of Freeman

(1984), which emphasizes that institutions generate broader social value when they recognize and respond to the interests of the multiple groups connected to them. In the context of Akpabuyo, schools are embedded within community structures and consequently possess a degree of institutional legitimacy that can facilitate interaction among diverse stakeholders.

Overall, the evidence suggests that Schools' Social Responsibility should be understood as a multidimensional component of rural transformation rather than as an optional extension of educational activities.

Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between Schools' Social Responsibility and rural development in Akpabuyo Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. The findings demonstrate that the role of schools extends beyond formal teaching and learning to include contributions to broader community development. As locally embedded institutions, schools possess physical facilities, human resources, institutional legitimacy, and community networks that can be mobilized to address local development needs.

The study found that Schools' Social Responsibility is significantly associated with rural development through three interconnected dimensions. First, school involvement in skills acquisition, health programmes, community infrastructure, and other socio-economic activities contributes to human-capital development and improved community wellbeing. Second, schools support demographic adjustment by providing spaces and opportunities that assist displaced and vulnerable populations, promote social interaction, and strengthen community resilience. Third, the use of school facilities for civic and political activities facilitates voter education, community meetings, public enlightenment, and participatory engagement, thereby supporting local governance and collective decision-making.

The study concludes that Schools' Social Responsibility represents an important but underrecognized pathway to rural development. However, schools should complement rather than

substitute for government responsibilities in infrastructure, healthcare, social protection, and governance.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen structured school-community development partnerships.

The Akpabuyo Local Government Council, schools, community development associations, and relevant development organizations should establish formal partnerships that enable schools to contribute their facilities and institutional capacities to locally identified priorities, particularly in skills development, health promotion, basic infrastructure, and community mobilization.

2. **Develop an integrated framework for demographic support and social inclusion.**

Schools, local authorities, community leaders, and humanitarian agencies should develop coordinated mechanisms for responding to displacement and population movements. Such mechanisms should provide appropriate access to school facilities during emergencies while promoting the social integration, protection, and resilience of displaced persons and host communities.

3. **Promote inclusive and non-partisan civic engagement through schools.**

Schools should collaborate with INEC and credible civic organizations to provide regulated spaces for voter education, civic enlightenment, community dialogue, and participatory development activities. Clear guidelines should be established to prevent partisan misuse of school facilities while ensuring that schools contribute positively to democratic participation and accountable local governance.

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