Impact of Yahaya Bello's Administration on the Socio-Economic Life of Kogi People, 2015-2023

Baba Isaac Ibrahim, PhD, Jeremiah Oluwaseun Memud & Abdulrahman Ochi Suberu, PhD

Department of History and International Studies, Federal University Lokoja, Nigeria

DOI: https://doi.org/10.68050/JAMS.2026.905

Received: 20 October 2026; Accepted: 28 October 2026; Published: 03 November 2026

ABSTRACT

This study examined the impact of Yahaya Bello's administration in Kogi State between 2015 and 2023, with emphasis on the policies, implementation patterns, and developmental outcomes recorded within the period under review. The study was informed by the need to assess whether governance in the state produced measurable improvements in the welfare of the people, particularly in relation to infrastructure, education, healthcare, employment, poverty reduction, and public service delivery. The study adopted the historical methodology combined with It adopted a mixed-method research design, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. Primary data were obtained through interviews with selected respondents, while secondary data were sourced from government publications, policy documents, budget reports, statistical records, and relevant scholarly works. The data collected were analysed to establish the relationship between governance decisions and socio-economic outcomes in the state. The findings revealed that although various policy initiatives and development projects were undertaken during the period, their impact on the general welfare of the people remained uneven. Some progress was recorded in infrastructure development and selected social interventions, but these gains were constrained by weak implementation, inadequate accountability, limited policy continuity, and uneven distribution of projects across the state. The study also found that socio-economic governance was affected by administrative inefficiency, fiscal challenges, and political considerations that shaped the pattern of resource allocation and service delivery. These factors contributed to a gap between government policy intentions and the actual living conditions of many residents. The study concluded that effective socio-economic governance in Kogi State requires stronger institutions, improved accountability, inclusive planning, and more transparent implementation of public policies. It recommended a governance approach that prioritises equity, efficiency, and sustainable development in order to improve the welfare of the people and strengthen state performance.

Keywords: Impact, Yahaya Bello, Administration, Socio-Economic, Kogi State.

INTRODUCTION

Kogi State occupied a strategic position in Nigeria's political geography and socio-economic history. Created on 27 August 1991 from parts of the former Kwara and Benue States, the state emerged from the old Kabba Province and brought together communities with different historical experiences under one administrative framework.[1] The state capital, Lokoja, lay at the confluence of the Rivers Niger and Benue and had long served as an administrative and commercial gateway in Nigeria.[2] The state's official development framework continued to describe Kogi as centrally located, richly endowed with arable land, and blessed with mineral resources, while identifying agriculture, mining, business, and tourism as key areas of potential.[3] Its citizen budget documents also reflected the government's efforts to present development planning as a public-facing process tied to social welfare and economic transformation.[3] These official records showed that the state's political identity had always been linked to questions of development, administrative balance, and public service delivery.

The subnational governance of Kogi State, Nigeria, between 2015 and 2023 presents a complex case study in public administration, fiscal transition, and developmental trade-offs. Under the administration of Governor

Yahaya Bello, the state embarked on an aggressive policy trajectory guided by its "New Direction" blueprint, aiming to modernize public finance, overhaul rural agriculture, and build high-prestige physical infrastructure. However, this top-down developmental push occurred in a highly challenging macroeconomic and social environment, characterized by intense labor disputes, a protracted civil service audit, and severe security challenges.[4] Consequently, the period was marked by a dual-speed development model, where significant modernization in revenue collection, tertiary education, and clinical infrastructure was offset by severe welfare deficits, wage arrears, and structural unemployment.

To systematically assess this eight-year governance cycle of Governor Yahaya Bello's Administration, this article analyses the positive socio-economic transformations alongside the negative externalities and governance deficits that emerged during this period.[5] By examining these dynamics through a rigorous public-choice framework, the analysis unpacks how subnational fiscal reforms interact with the socio-economic welfare of a civil-service-dependent population.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the historical methodology combined with a mixed-method research design, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. Primary data were obtained through interviews with selected respondents, while secondary data were sourced from government publications, policy documents, budget reports, statistical records, and relevant scholarly works. The data collected were analysed to establish the relationship between governance decisions and socio-economic outcomes in the state. The respondents were randomly selected from the three Senatorial Districts (that is Kogi East, Kogi Central and Kogi West). This was done to ensure that there is a nuanced analysis of the impact of the administration.

Positive Impact of Yahaya Bello's Administration on Socio-Economic Life of the People of Kogi State 2015–2023

Economic Impact

Several policy initiatives boosted Kogi's economy. One flagship was the Agricultural Revolution Programme (ARP) launched in early 2017, aimed at making Kogi self-sufficient in food and "boosting its income generation".[6] By transforming farming into a business, ARP sought to diversify the economy beyond civil service. For example, Kogi's government reported that international agribusiness investors pledged ₦144 billion ($400 million) for dairy, rice, and other farming projects, promising roughly 12,000 direct jobs and 25–30,000 indirect jobs. Such investments were expected to increase local incomes and exports, turning agriculture into a new "economic renaissance". In addition, the state implemented business-friendly measures (credit for SMEs, youth enterprise funds, etc.) that stimulated small-scale industries and trade, further fueling economic activity.[7]

Impact on the Education Sub-Sector

Kogi's government made education a budgetary and policy priority. In 2020 the state enacted a new Education Law and launched a comprehensive State Education Strategic Plan (SESP 2021–2030), along with a detailed operational plan (SESOP 2021–2027). This strategic framework informed by federal education goals aimed to improve quality, expand access (especially for girls and rural children), and upgrade school facilities. In practice, the Bello administration massively increased education funding.[8]

The results in basic and secondary education have been notable. Kogi's government reported renovating hundreds of classrooms and hiring thousands of teachers. By early 2024, about 833 dilapidated classroom blocks had been rehabilitated and another 1,800 new classrooms built across the state.[9] The government also constructed a number of models "GYB Science Schools" to emphasize STEM. In 2023 the governor formally declared free education for all public primary and secondary students, including waiving exam fees for WAEC/NECO/JAMB. In summary, Kogi's education reforms greatly increased enrollment, improved facilities, and built human capital – setting a foundation for longer-term socio-economic benefits.[10]

In the educational sector, the state government focused on the dual objectives of infrastructural rehabilitation and institutional capacity expansion. The physical footprint of this reform included the construction of over 1,800 classrooms, the renovation of 833 classroom blocks, and the physical rehabilitation of over 600 schools across the three senatorial districts. To complement these infrastructural enhancements, the state distributed over 35,000 desks and learning materials and established the GYB Model Science Secondary Schools, designed to foster secondary-level technical education.[11]

Confluence University of Science & Technology



Source: Kogi Reports. "How Yahaya Bello Built a New Kogi State — Roads, Schools, Hospitals, Power and More in Eight Years." *Kogi Reports*, April 30, 2026.

To address the state's vocational skills gap, Technical Colleges in each of the three senatorial zones: Lokoja (Kogi West), Okene (Kogi Central), Dekina (Kogi East) were established. These institutions were designed to promote technical and entrepreneurial skills among secondary school leavers and artisans, particularly in trades such as welding, electrical works, ICT, and fabrication. The policy aligns with national efforts to revive technical education and reduce reliance on white-collar jobs.[12] While the infrastructural aspect of these colleges has been largely praised, concerns have been raised regarding staffing, curriculum implementation, and public awareness of the programs in rural communities.[13]

Social Impact

Social outcomes have improved in some areas due to the state's policies. By creating new opportunities for youth and communities, the government helped address social ills. For example, officials report that the ARP and related programs literally "saved the youth from the throes of criminality". Agricultural projects at the Omi Dam and Osara Greenhouse Complex engaged thousands of unemployed young people, turning idle hands into farmers and entrepreneurs.[14] In rural areas, community health and education drives also strengthened social welfare (e.g. increased literacy and nutrition programs), though data are limited.[15]

Youth participation in governance also received considerable attention during the period under review. A notable number of young individuals were appointed into public offices, including positions within the executive branch, local government administration, and various government agencies.[15] This development reflected broader efforts to encourage youth inclusion in public administration and decision-making processes. The appointment of younger public officials represented a departure from the traditional dominance of older political actors and was widely interpreted as an attempt to broaden political participation among younger generations.[16]

Overall, the period witnessed significant efforts aimed at promoting youth empowerment, entrepreneurship, and economic participation across Kogi State. Although numerous beneficiaries received training, financial support, productive assets, and opportunities for public service, concerns regarding sustainability, transparency, programme continuity, and long-term socio-economic outcomes remained important issues in assessing the effectiveness of these interventions.[17] The mixed results highlight both the achievements and limitations of government efforts to utilize empowerment programmes as instruments of socio-economic development.[18]

Impact on the Agricultural Sub-Sector

Agriculture, the traditional economic base, saw its share of revolution. The ARP (2017) and follow-on programs reoriented state support toward farming as business. For example, Kogi distributed improved inputs (seeds, fertilizers) and mechanization to farmers, and completed major irrigation projects at Omi and Osara. The government reports record harvests in staples like yam and cassava, making Kogi a top national producer. Export crops (cashew, cocoa, coffee, cotton)received similar attention.[19] As one leader stated, “Agriculture is the oil well of Kogi State”.

Mechanised agricultural equipment pools deployed for regional distribution



Source: Kogi Reports. "How Yahaya Bello Built a New Kogi State — Roads, Schools, Hospitals, Power and More in Eight Years." *Kogi Reports*, April 30, 2026.

To transition the state from a purely agrarian economy to an agro-industrial hub, the administration prioritised massive investments in mechanised farming and value-chain integration. The cornerstone of this strategy was the establishment of the ₦4 billion Kogi Confluence Rice Mill at Ejiba in Yagba West LGA, which has a daily processing capacity of 50 tons and spans over 800 hectares of dedicated cultivation land.[23] This industrial asset was designed to generate over 6,000 direct and indirect jobs, utilising an extensive Out-Grower’s empowerment program to guarantee a consistent feedstock supply for the mill. To support mechanisation across all 21 LGAs, the state distributed 375 tractors, 1,500 power tillers, combined harvesters, and specialised boom harvesters.

Industrial processing infrastructure at the Kogi Confluence Rice Mill in Ejiba.



Source: Kogi Reports. "How Yahaya Bello Built a New Kogi State — Roads, Schools, Hospitals, Power and More in Eight Years." *Kogi Reports*, April 30, 2026.

The physical investments were integrated with global and national development partnerships to guarantee sustainability. The state government paid its counterpart funds to activate the World Bank-assisted APPEALS (Agro-Processing, Productivity Enhancement and Livelihood Improvement Support) project, the IFAD-funded Value Chain Development Programme (VCDP), and the L-PRES project.[20] These initiatives successfully mobilised resources to empower over 10,000 women and youth through commodity-based cluster formations in rice, cassava, and cashew value chains. Through the wet-season farming inputs distributed under these programs, hundreds of localised smallholders in communities like Owara and Osara reported substantial increases in crop yields, enhancing local food security and rural incomes.[21]

Impact on Infrastructure

Physical infrastructure expanded markedly under the state's development agenda. The road network saw extensive rehabilitation; by 2021, the Ministry of Works reported the launch of over 30 major road projects statewide. These included key urban corridors (Lokoja, Okene town roads) and rural feeder routes linking farms to markets. They also built bridges, drainage channels, and streetlights in many localities. Officials proudly called these efforts "unprecedented" for Kogi. Beyond roads, Kogi invested in educational and health facilities, including hundreds of new classrooms and dozens of clinic units,[22] as noted above.

It was officially commissioned in November 2021. The Ganaja Junction Flyover, the first of its kind in Kogi State, was constructed to reduce traffic congestion in Lokoja, a strategic confluence city linking the North and South. Completed in 2022, the flyover has reportedly improved vehicular flow and urban aesthetics. The Bello administration also undertook massive street lighting installations and the renovation of metropolitan roads in Lokoja and surrounding areas. This urban beautification was aimed at boosting tourism potential and promoting nighttime economic activity.[23]

The Ganaja Junction Flyover Bridge, Lokoja Kogi State



Source: Kogi Reports. "How Yahaya Bello Built a New Kogi State — Roads, Schools, Hospitals, Power and More in Eight Years." *Kogi Reports*, April 30, 2026.

Health Impact

The health sector saw significant new initiatives, especially maternal and childcare. In mid-2019, Governor Bello launched a free healthcare scheme for pregnant women. This programme, known as "Healthcare Plus" renovated and re-equipped primary health centres, offering free antenatal, delivery, and newborn services to poor women.[24] Early results were dramatic: the government reported antenatal attendance at participating clinics jumped by 60%, and facility deliveries rose by 50%. By scaling up this model statewide, Kogi intended to reduce maternal and infant mortality. Such health investments complemented broader moves: for example, the state introduced a health insurance scheme and patient navigation to reach 220,000 beneficiaries.[25]

Furthermore, Kogi expanded health infrastructure. The state systematically renovated dozens of rural clinics and recruited medical staff. In 2023, the governor's office announced the completion of over 80 renovated Primary Health Centres with new staff quarters, boreholes, and solar power.[26] It also approved special allowances for doctors and created midwife training colleges to address chronic staff shortages. As a result, coverage improved; for instance, health officials noted a major drop in malaria prevalence in 2024 (Kogi Health Commission) and higher immunisation rates. A 2022 government report listed over 1,000 public facilities (mostly PHCs) across Kogi, up from far fewer in 2015. Overall, while Kogi still lags national averages, targeted health reforms under Bello's government increased access to care, especially for mothers and children, yielding clear gains in public health indicators.[27]

The modernisation of tertiary healthcare delivery represented the primary focus of the administration's capital expenditure program. The centrepiece of this intervention was the construction and equipping of the state-of-the-art Reference Hospital in Okene, which was subsequently converted by legislative assent into the Confluence University of Science and Technology Teaching Hospital (CUSTECH-TH).[28] This facility was designed as a tertiary referral hub to curtail the high incidence of medical tourism and address localised gaps in specialised clinical care. Alongside this signature project, the state remodelled over ten general hospitals across various local government areas and established a modern diagnostic and imaging centre in the state capital, Lokoja.[29]

Negative Impact of Yahaya Bello's Administration on Socio-Economic Life of the People of Kogi State, 2015–2023

Wage Arrears and Salary Delays

A persistent problem has been unpaid wages and benefits. Kogi amassed large backlogs of indebtedness; official records in 2018 showed some ₦58 billion in outstanding obligations, including contractors' bills, pensions, and salary arrears. To tackle this, the state adopted an "Arrears Clearance Framework" that year, aiming to gradually retire the debt.[30] Despite these frameworks, many workers still experienced irregular pay. Civil servants and retirees repeatedly protested unpaid months of salary or pension. For instance, in 2022 the government admitted there were delays in March pension disbursements, blaming bank network issues while insisting "the government owed retirees nothing". Such public disputes over payworthiness happened multiple times: union leaders frequently appealed to the governor to pay all owed wages, gratuities, and pensions.[31]

Insecurity and Conflicts

Kogi State's unique geography, bordering ten other states, created severe security challenges that the administration struggled to manage. Despite substantial investments in security logistics and the establishment of local vigilante groups, the state witnessed a significant rise in violent crimes, cultism, political thuggery, and highway kidnapping.[32] The practice of kidnapping, which initially targeted wealthy elites, evolved to target the middle class, civil servants, and ordinary travelers, creating a climate of fear that severely restricted night travel and crippled the state's night-time economy. This pervasive insecurity led to a high level of social mistrust, discouraging potential local and foreign investors and forcing expatriates to relocate.[33]

Public Corruption Allegations and Treasury Oversight Deficits

The administration's developmental legacy was heavily overshadowed by high-profile corruption investigations and allegations of public financial mismanagement. Following the expiration of his tenure, former Governor Yahaya Bello and several close associates (including Ali Bello and Abdulsalam Hudu) were prosecuted by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) on multiple charges of money laundering, criminal breach of trust, and the misappropriation of public funds.[34] The anti-graft agency tendered extensive bank records from Zenith Bank, FCMB, and Sterling Bank, detailing a massive ₦110.4 billion fraud case that involved routing state funds to private businesses, luxury hotel services, and offshore pre-payments for foreign school tuition.[35]

The administration launched aggressive media campaigns and legal counter-suits accusing the anti-graft agency of political witch-hunting, yet the controversy exposed severe institutional deficits in the state's treasury oversight and public procurement systems.

Allegations of corruption have plagued Kogi's government and hampered development. Critics argue that opaque contracting and nepotistic appointments allowed funds to be diverted from public projects. Even supportive press accounts concede that news of "violence, killings, and… corruption" often overshadowed Kogi's progress. For instance, despite large budgets for roads, education, and health, independent auditors and civic groups complained of cost overruns and unfinished contracts with little accountability. These reports eroded public confidence that new schools or hospitals would be completed.[36]

Unemployment and Underemployment

Despite job-creation rhetoric, unemployment and underemployment remained high. Official unemployment rates (often reported at ~3–4%) understate the true situation, since most Kogites work informally. Many graduates and young people found few formal opportunities. Even agriculture-focused programmes created far fewer positions than the number of job-seekers. in subsistence farming or petty trading.[37]

The administration did introduce youth empowerment initiatives (loans, skills training, artisan programs), but coverage was limited. Survey data suggest that many youths (especially in cities like Okene and Kabba) still face unemployment rates higher than the national average. Rising urban poverty and informal-sector growth indicate underemployment: people often take part-time or seasonal jobs rather than stable careers. Thus, one negative outcome of the 2015–2023 period is that, despite the hype of economic reforms, open unemployment and disguised unemployment remained persistent problems. Many young Kogites today still report having to migrate or engage in menial work, dampening morale and straining social services (e.g. higher crime rates linked to joblessness).[38]

Social Welfare and Pension Shortfalls

Finally, social protection remained weak. Aside from the wage/pension issues noted above, Kogi had no large-scale poverty grant or unemployment benefit scheme. The government did roll out some scholarships and food schemes, but coverage was small compared to need. Many poor families still lack consistent support for housing, electricity, or health. The pension problems illustrate this gap: retirees fell back on community networks or withheld health care when pensions arrived late or incomplete. Elderly citizens in rural areas often cited the lack of a formal safety net beyond subsistence farming.[39]

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This article assessed the impact of Yahaya Bello's Administration in Kogi State from 2015 to 2023 by presenting a deeply polarised structural legacy, showcasing the complex trade-offs inherent in rapid subnational modernisation. On the structural credit side, the administration achieved historic milestones by aggressively expanding internally generated revenue (IGR) from a baseline of approximately ₦350 million to over ₦1.3 billion monthly, implementing robust agricultural interventions like the Kogi Confluence Rice Mill, and building state-of-the-art facilities such as the Confluence University of Science and Technology

(CUSTECH) and the Reference Hospital in Okene. Conversely, these macro-economic and physical gains were profoundly undermined by a severe human welfare deficit, characterised by chronic wage arrears, unilateral violations of labour agreements, persistent percentage pension payments, and escalating rural insecurity. Ultimately, the Kogi State experience during this period demonstrates that infrastructural and fiscal transformation cannot yield holistic socio-economic development if achieved at the expense of human capital stability, labour relations, and localised public safety underscoring a critical policy lesson for contemporary subnational governance across the Nigerian federation.

Indeed, governance in Kogi State between 2015 to 2023 demonstrated a profound tension between official development narratives and the actual socio-economic conditions experienced by the populace. The administration made visible efforts to restructure the civil service and initiate infrastructure projects; however, these initiatives did not fundamentally alter the state's multidimensional poverty index or its informal, vulnerable employment landscape.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that effective socio-economic governance in Kogi State requires stronger institutions, improved accountability, inclusive planning, and more transparent implementation of public policies. The socio-economic development within this period of study was significantly undermined by weak institutional capacity, a heavy fiscal dependency on federal allocations, and the overarching influence of prebendal politics. While capital expenditures occasionally rose, they were frequently directed toward politically symbolic projects rather than holistic, human-capital-driven investments in healthcare, education, and rural agricultural support. Consequently, socio-economic governance in Kogi State during this era functioned less as an engine for equitable development and more as a mechanism for political consolidation, leaving a substantial portion of the state's citizens marginalised from the dividends of democratic governance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness of socio-economic governance in Kogi State:

i. **Institutional De-politicisation and Capacity Building:** The state must prioritise the development of a merit-based civil service. Recruitment, promotions, and the execution of governmental policies should be insulated from ethnic and political patronage to ensure that administrative efficiency drives service delivery. To bring governance closer to the people, local governments in Kogi State must be granted the political and financial autonomy necessary to function. Empowering local administrations will ensure that grassroots socio-economic policies are adequately funded, locally relevant, and effectively executed without excessive state-level interference.

ii. **Equitable Infrastructure and Resource Distribution:** Future developmental planning must adopt a genuinely inclusive, needs-based spatial approach rather than one dictated by electoral calculations. The state government should establish an independent monitoring framework to ensure that capital projects, schools, and healthcare facilities are fairly distributed across Kogi East, Kogi Central, and Kogi West.

iii. **Prioritisation of Human Capital Development:** While physical infrastructure is vital, the government must aggressively pivot toward human capital investment. This entails increasing the budgetary allocation and actual funding disbursements to basic education and primary healthcare centres, particularly in rural, hard-to-reach local government areas. Recognising that agriculture is the primary livelihood for the majority of the population, the state must transition from tokenistic fertilizer distribution to comprehensive rural support. This requires heavy investment in rural feeder roads, agricultural processing facilities, and definitive, community-led dialogue mechanisms to resolve the persistent farmer-herder conflicts that threaten food security.

iv. **Strengthening Local Government Autonomy:** There is a need to strengthen Local Government administration by ensuring fiscal autonomy at that level of governance. The Local Government

Authority is the closest government to the people at the grassroots level and it is largely used to assess governance at the subnational and national level.

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