

THE IMPACT OF N-POWER PROGRAMME ON YOUTH ENTERPRISE IN MINNA METROPOLIS

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the impact of N-Power programmes on youth empowerment in Minna Metropolis, Niger State. A cross sectional survey design was used in this study to generate data. A sample of 225 respondent youths were obtained from 512 total number of N-Power beneficiaries in the metropolis for the study. The study used a structured questionnaire to obtain responses from the study sample. Descriptive statistics such as mean and percentages were used to measure the demographic data while inferential statistics such as Pearson product moment correlation was used to analyse data in this study. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Co-efficient (r) was employed to test the hypotheses. The study focused on graduate unemployed related to N-Power programme. This includes: N-Power Agro, N-Power Health and N-Power Teach. The results of the study indicated that there is a no significant relationship between the N-power scheme against the following variables, Employment generation, poverty alleviation and skill acquisition. The study also found that the major factors that are militating against the effectiveness of the N-Power programme includes; Job insecurity, non-payment of stipend to participants as at when due, bribery and corruption, poor monitoring. The study therefore recommends that the authorities concerned should expand the horizon of the programme to cover more unemployed graduates, turn the programme to tenure employment opportunities for the beneficiaries and provide grant to enterprising graduates to gainfully employ their latent skills.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship and Youth Enterprise, Job creation, N-power programme, Poverty alleviation and Skill acquisition.

INTRODUCTION

The depiction of Nigeria as abundant paradox by the World Bank (WB, 2018) has continued to contradict the official statistics in the government circle. The paradox is that it cannot just be described how a resources endowed country experiencing high inflation, high unemployment and high incidence poverty can be said to be developing, even if its economic growth is in double digits. Nigeria is making little progress in eliminating

poverty. The report by the global development institution shows that the human capital spending in Nigeria is among the worst in the world after overtaking India to assume the inglorious position of the “poverty capital” of the world.

Among other things, the country is enormously endowed with human, agricultural, petroleum, gas, and large untapped solid mineral resources. Particularly worrisome is that the country earned over US\$300 billion from only petroleum resources during the last three decades of the twentieth century. But rather than record outstanding progress in national socio-economic development, Nigeria retrogressed to become one of the 25 poorest nations at the threshold of twenty-first century whereas she was among the wealthiest fifty (50) countries in the early-1970s.

Poverty and unemployment are siamese evils bedeviling Nigerian path to growth and development. National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) report indicates how the “population of Nigerians in poverty has maintain a consistent increase from 17.7 million in 1988 to 66.7 million in 2004”. In 2010, the NBS reported that 60.9% of Nigerians were living in poverty (Obadan, 2017). “The world poverty clock in 2018 stated that Nigeria assumed the ignoble position of being the poverty capital of the world” after overtaking India, with about 86.9 million of her population in extreme poverty” (Odey & Sambe, 2019). To corroborate this assertion, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in the 2012 National Baseline Survey, documented that more than half of the Nigerian youths population in the country are unemployed (Obadan, 2017). Poverty and unemployment rate continue to climb vertically, translating into social problems of more monumental and complicated proportions, attempting to defy successive government intervention programmes geared towards ameliorating them. Every government since 1999, has had their signature poverty reduction or alleviation schemes under different appellations.

The government of President Olesgun Aremu Obasanjo (1999-2007) initiated the National Poverty Eradication Program (NAPEP) to alleviate poverty. According to Aderonmu (2017), NAPEP was established in 2010 as the primary agency of the federal government to eradicate extreme hunger and poverty in Nigeria. The core programme under the scheme involves Youth Empowerment Scheme and National Resource development and Conservation Scheme. It was revealed that despite the humongous financial outlay for the schemes, poverty and youth unemployment continued unabated.

In 2011, the Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme - (SURE -P) was birthed. This scheme was designed and implemented by the then president Goodluck Ebele Azikiwe Jonathan administration (2011-2015) as social intervention scheme aimed at providing employments for unemployed graduates through internship programs. The core mandate of SURE-P with regards to poverty reduction includes: the Mass transit Scheme, Vocational Training Scheme and Community Service/ Women and Youth

Employment (CSWYE). This initiative has been severally criticized for lacking transparency, and was laden with monumental corruption. Asawo (2016) in a study on Subsidy Reinvestment Programme (SURE-P) and job creation in Nigeria (2012-2015) concluded that the program failed in its mandate to create employment generation in Nigeria as youth unemployment and wide scale poverty in the country still remain steadily high.

The Administration of President Muhammadu Buhari “designed and implemented the current National Social Investments Programme (N-SIP) as strategy for combating poverty and unemployment. The N-SIP scheme was created to enable citizens exit from the twin evils of poverty and unemployment through capacity building, investment and direct financial support (Abin, 2018). The programme consists of four major components include the Job Creation and Youth Empowerment (N- Power), National Home Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP), National Cash Transfer Programme (NCTP) and Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP). NSIP generally aimed at increasing the poor and vulnerable household with income/livelihood by providing access to targeted funds, thereby improving household ability to absorb economic shock (Abin, 2018).

N-Power is a scheme under the National Social Investments Programme of the Nigerian Federal Government geared towards graduates job creation; poverty alleviation and empowerment initiatives through volunteering services. The programme is available for graduate and non-graduates. It is aimed at inculcating in Nigerian youths the learn-work entrepreneurship culture between the ages of 18-35 (FGN 2018). According to Kabeer (2018), the goals of the programme include; reducing the rate of unemployment in the country, facilitating the transfer of entrepreneurial, technical skills and employability ability and bringing solution to active public service and government diversification policy. The graduate’s category is further divided into three areas namely, the N –Teach, N–Health and N–Agro. For the non–graduates category, N–Build Scheme is geared towards equipping its beneficiaries with necessary and meaningful skills to be self-employed. Based on the forgoing, this paper is limited to the N–Power scheme with a view to assessing its impact in ameliorating youth unemployment, mitigating the high incidence of poverty and skill acquisition respectively”.

Statement of the Problem

Poverty and unemployment remains one of the biggest social problems in Nigeria today. Available data from NBS (2010) shows that more than half of Nigerians population is currently living in squalid livelihood and has consistently remained a worrisome phenomenon demanding urgent national attention (Obadan, 2017). This is not unconnected to the fact that the poverty rate continues and had remained unabated in society, which gives room for other social vices such as armed robbery, burglary as

corroborated by Olajide and Diah (2017) reports, which asserted that insecurity in Nigeria can be linked with growing poverty rate. To tackle this problem, successive Governments of Nigeria have implemented a range of measures, including NAPEP, SURE-P and currently the NSIP initiative. The NSIP initiative is envisaged to address a range of social problems such as curbing the incidence of poverty, teeming youth unemployment, entrepreneurship orientation and increasing school enrolment (Akujuru & Enyioko, 2019). The N-power initiative, which is the job creation component of the policy aims at reducing poverty and unemployment and is targeted at the Nigerian youths. However, creating a policy and its implementation to achieve set goals appear to be mutually exclusive in the Nigerian context. Efforts by successive governments to combat the excruciating poverty and monumental unemployment as well as other initiatives geared toward alleviating the precarious situation surrounding the Nigerian youths and to enhance the quality of life had ended in fiasco, as a consequence of abysmal and porous implementation of the said programmes. The aim of this study is to assess the impact of the N-power scheme in three salient areas via employment generation, economic well-being and skills enhancement.

Objectives of the Study

The study is aimed at assessing the impact of the N-Power scheme on youth enterprise in Minna Metropolis, Niger State. Specifically, the study set out to:

- i. examine the influence of N- Power scheme on employment generation
- ii. ascertain the effects of N-Power scheme on poverty alleviation
- iii. determine the influence of N - Power scheme on skill acquisition.

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses have been designed to guide this study:

- i. There is no significant relationship between the N- Power Scheme and employment generation.
- ii. There is no significant relationship between the N -Power scheme and poverty alleviation.
- iii. There is no significant relationship between the N - Power scheme and skill acquisition.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The poverty rate in Nigeria is alarming and worrisome. This is because despite the potentials of Nigeria in terms of her natural, human resources and numerical strength, poverty remains endemic and has engulfed a large proportion of its teeming population. Awogbenle, and Iwuamadi (2010) stated that “the issue of poverty in Nigeria is a paradox, a case of poverty in the midst of plenty”. Similarly, Na’Allah (2007) found that the United Nations’ Human Poverty Index Report of 1999 positioned Nigeria among the 25 poverty-stricken countries in the world. The UNDP (2010) report on poverty incidence, indicated that the population of Nigerians in poverty is pegged at 68.7 million as at 2004

and in the last quota of 2016, the NBS revealed that not less than 112 million Nigerian representing 67.1% of the entire country's population of 160 then were living below UN poverty level of \$2 per day (Odey & Sambe, 2019). Generally, the available statistics on the incidence of poverty in Nigeria revealed certain characteristics. This includes the fact that a majority of the poor in Nigeria reside in the rural areas; that squalid livelihood is more prevalent in the Northern side of Nigeria than the South; and lastly, that though there exist disparity in the poverty rates between North and South/ rural and urban areas, the urban slums dwellers are the most deprived group in the country. In summary, poverty in Nigeria can be attributed to several factors which includes unstable political history, government corruption and mismanagement, lack of coherent policies formulation, implementation evaluation, over dependent on oil, poor infrastructures, among others. Over the years, government has reacted strongly to the rising poverty trends in the country. Okoro and Bassey (2018) stated that several poverty reduction approaches have been formulated and implemented all with the objective or attempts geared towards arresting the beleaguered poverty situation in the country. From 1999 till date, some of the poverty reduction measures include the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), SURE- P, N-SIP. Despite the litanies of programmes on poverty reduction in Nigeria, it has been observed that the incidence of poverty in Nigeria is exacerbating rather than ameliorated (Kayode, Arome & Anyio, 2016).

Overview of N-Power Scheme

The World Bank group in June 2016 granted the sum of \$.5 billion International Development Association credit to assist in the establishment of programmes aimed at economic development in Nigeria. The Federal Government of Nigeria sourced an additional \$1.3 billion from its budget to create the social safety net programmes which came to be known as the National Social Investment Program (NSIP). Since then, more than 4 million people have benefited directly from financial assistance, job training and social intervention scheme of these programmes (NBS, 2018).

The N-Power Programme was established to curb teeming youth's joblessness and help to enhance social security. The Programme was fashioned to target Nigerians between the age brackets of 18 to 35 "to acquire and develop life-long skills for becoming change makers in their communities. By deploying a force of 500,000 trained graduated in their communities, the N-Power Programme is a community-sourced solution to the nation's under-developed public services like education, healthcare, and civic engagement (N-Power, 2017). The Programme is built to prepare young Nigerians for a modern, globalized economy by helping equip youths with skills and certifications for emerging global markets. Nigeria is looking to increase its already bustling technology sector by supporting a talent pool of software developers, hardware professionals, and other tech-based skills such as animators and digital artists".

Volunteer Corps

The establishment of N-Power Volunteer Corps by the Buhari Government is to provide young graduates of tertiary institutions a two-year paid programme of temporary employment. The successful graduates are saddled with the responsibilities of addressing public service challenges in their immediate communities. These services are in the forms of providing teaching, instructional and advisory solutions in four important areas of economic development (Odey & Sambe, 2019).

Education: There is a growing dearth of qualified teachers in Nigerian public schools. The N-Power Teach programme helps fill this gap to improve the quality of basic education in Nigerian basic schools. According to Akujuru & Enyioko (2019), volunteers are deployed as teacher assistants in primary schools where they engage with students to foster relationships and build confidence while supporting their educational development. In addition, these volunteers bring education solutions to underserved communities, helping the most marginalized members of their communities to get access to the education they need to participate in the modern workforce. As part of this programme volunteers help implement STEM programmes in primary schools with a particular focus on computer science, engineering, applied mathematics, and other tech information knowledge (Bennel, 2017).

Health: The N-Power Health Programme deploys volunteers to help improve and provide preventive health care in their communities to vulnerable members of the society, including pregnant women and children. By increasing access to basic health services in underserved communities, the N-Power Health Programme serves the double purpose of increasing the overall well being of millions of citizens and supporting the development of healthcare infrastructure with community-based solutions (Akujuru & Enyioko, 2019).

Agriculture: N-Power Agro is the programme designed to provide services to farmers across the country. Part of the focus is to support the development of efficient farming techniques and practices to maximize productivity in the agricultural sector. The other side of the programme provides technological and institutional development to farming communities in rural areas, places where the public service sector is particularly underrepresented. By creating a stronger link between rural and urban communities and centralizing the knowledge base while incorporating local knowledge and practices, the N-Power Agro programme is built to link the diverse communities of Nigeria while promoting a modern economy (Odey & Sambe, 2019).

Conditional Cash Transfer Program (CCT)

Nigeria's Conditional Cash Transfer programme provides targeted cash transfers to the most vulnerable households with the long-term goal of lifting millions out of poverty. A

monthly stipend of N5,000 (\$13.89) is given to households in poverty-stricken communities along with an additional N5,000 for families designated as priorities or extreme cases. Along with the cash transfers, as part of the programme, beneficiaries are supported, mentored, and coached by trained Community Facilitators who visit them weekly to help them take ownership of their lives. Savings groups are formed with the intention of creating communities to share and grow financial knowledge, provide training for employment and life skills, as well as improve nutrition, hygiene, and sanitary conditions. Part of the requirement is that households with school-age children enroll in school to promote education enrollment and incentivize educational attainment. As of 2018, payment was going to over 297,000 beneficiaries supported by 2,495 Community Facilitators (Odey & Sambe, 2019).

Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP)

The Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme was established to provide financial support and training to businesses and entrepreneurs at the bottom of the financial pyramid. By providing low-cost micro-lending to over a million women, enterprising youths, agricultural workers, and other vulnerable economic producers, the Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme supports the development of otherwise low-productivity sectors of the population, bringing millions of people into the modern economy and lifting communities out of poverty.

A federal grant of N140 billion (US\$388,888.88) was invested on the programme with the goal of reaching over a million women, 200,000 artisans and MSMEs 260,000 youth business ventures, and 200,000 farmers and agricultural workers (Odey & Sambe, 2019).

Home Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSEF)

The Home Grown School Feeding Programme was created to provide a nutritious and balanced meal to 5.5 million school children grades 1 to 3. The Programme aims to improve the enrollment of primary school children and reduce the drop-out rate, currently estimated at over 30%. Most of this shortage is due to poverty and this programme is built to address the most important basic need of schoolchildren and provide the nutrition needed to engage successfully with their education. By linking the programme to local food supply chains, the community is engaged to create a social support beyond simply providing meals to certain children. Over 44,000 cooks are engaged in the program, feeding over 4 million students in 26 Nigerian States (Akujuru & Enyioko, 2019). The intention is a cycle of productivity, sustaining and connecting local farmers to nationwide and global markets while providing the next generation with the sustenance necessary for education and growth. Local economies are directly stimulated in various sectors, from education to the service industry to the agricultural sector, while educational attainment and acquisition of skills are encouraged and supported among the youth.

The Youth Empowerment

According to the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment (PAYE), 2006 – 2015, developed through wide-consultation with key stakeholders in all regions of the Commonwealth, youth empowerment is to empower, engage and create value so that young women and men can contribute to the economic, social and cultural advancement of their families and countries and to their own fulfillment. Enyioko (2006) also identified the following dimensions of youth empowerment: Young people are empowered when they acknowledge that they have or can create choices in life, are aware of the implications of those choices, make an informed decision freely, take action based on that decision and accept responsibility for the consequences of these actions. Empowering young people means creating and supporting the enabling conditions under which young people can act on their own behalf, and on their own terms, rather than at the directions of others. The enabling conditions according to Aderonmu (2017) fall into four broad categories: an economic and social base, political will, adequate resource allocation and supportive legal and administrative frameworks; a stable environment of equality, peace and democracy and access to knowledge, information and skills; and a positive value system”.

Theoretical Framework: Systems Theory

This theory views government as system with input coming from the masses in the form of demands for economic and social well-being as well as the provision of basic necessities of life by the government for the overall benefit of the citizenry (Ajufo, 2013). The government serves as the processing unit which takes inputs in form of demands, processes them and sent out outputs in form of authoritative decisions in form of policy initiatives in the instant geared towards poverty reduction. The theory shows how government reacts to people’s plight in terms of the provision of the basic necessities of life. The theory highlights how demands of the people are presented to government, government actions on the said demands and the out being the programme that will enhance the well-being of the peoples.

METHODOLOGY

The research design adopted for this study is cross sectional survey design to assess the impact of N-power programme on youth enterprise in Minna Metropolis. Population of the study comprised all beneficiaries of N-Power programme in Minna, Metropolis, Niger State, Nigeria. This includes all males and females from 18 to 35 years who are beneficiaries of N-Power programme in the area. Cluster random sampling technique was used in selection of 225 samples for the study out of 512 beneficiaries in the study area. These were drawn from N-Teach, N-Agro and N-Health strands of the programme. The researchers went to Places of Primary Assignments (PPAs) of beneficiaries across the Metropolis. Data for the study was collected through a structured questionnaire using 5 points measuring scale.

Hypotheses Testing

The study used Pearson Moment correlation in testing the hypotheses generated to guide this work. This approach is used as statistical analysis techniques to determine the empirical relationship between dependent and independent variables in a quantitative survey.

Correlations

		Beneficiary	Job Creation	Poverty Reduction	Skill Acquisition
Beneficiary	Pearson Correlation	1	.181	.166	.195
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.297	.340	.343
	N	225	225	225	225
Employment Creation	Pearson Correlation	.181	1	.077	.352*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.297		.659	.038
	N	225	225	225	225
Poverty Reduction	Pearson Correlation	.166	.077	1	-.327
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.340	.659		.055
	N	225	225	225	225
Skill Acquisition	Pearson Correlation	.165	.352*	.327	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.343	.038	.055	
	N	225	225	225	225

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.005 level (2-tailed).

Source: Researcher’s computation (2019).

Hypothesis 1: *There is no significant relationship between N-Power program and job creation*

The correlation result obtained for N-power beneficiary and job creation in the analysis is 0.181 at a two-tailed level of significance of 0.05, implying that there is no statistical significance between the job creation and N-power. Hence, the research null hypothesis result which indicates that there is no significant relationship between N-power programmes and job creation is upheld.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between N-power programme and poverty reduction

The correlation result obtained for N-power beneficiary and poverty reduction in the analysis is 0.166 at a two-tailed level of significance of 0.05, implying that there is no statistical significance between the poverty reduction and N-power. Hence, the null hypothesis which states that *there is no significant relationship between N-power programmes and poverty reduction* is accepted.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant relationship between N-power programme and skill acquisition.

The correlation result obtained for N-power beneficiary and skill acquisition in the analysis is 0.195 at a two-tailed level of significance of 0.05, implying that there is no statistical significance between the N-power program and skill acquisition. Hence, the null hypothesis which states that *there is no significant relationship between N-power programmes and skill acquisition* is accepted.

Discussion of Results

This section discusses the data analysis for better understanding of the basis on which all the null hypotheses were accepted.

Job Creation: The most prominent objective of establishing N-power programme is to create temporary jobs to the unemployed graduates for two years and provide access to soft loans to the indigents. However, finding from the data analysis revealed that this objective has not been sufficiently met. The responses from the respondents surveyed indicated that most graduate beneficiaries are apprehensive because the two years mandate has lapsed and the future is gloomy. Lack of access to loan is a dominating constraint to paucity of jobs in the economy as proven by the findings of this study. This is in line with Onuoha et'al (2019) that the luxury of concentrating on long-term job growth and labour supply strategies is not an immediate choice for countries emerging from recession, the Nigerian experience requires government practitioners to focus more narrowly on stimulating labour demand and employing workers.

Poverty Reduction: Another strong reason for establishing N-power programme is to reduce to the barest minimum the incidence of poverty in the society. The dependent variable was compared against poverty reduction variable, result revealed that N-power is not doing enough to reduce poverty in the area surveyed hence the null hypothesis was accepted. This proves that there was no sufficient statistical significance between the number of beneficiaries and reduction in the level of poverty in the area of focus. The effects of 30,000 monthly stipend being advanced to beneficiaries relative to sky-rocketing inflationary trend tend to erode the good intentions of the government. The reality is that

only about 5-7% of the teaming unemployed graduates are within the coverage of N-power programme. According to Obadan (2017) the increasing incidence of poverty, both within and among locations, was in spite of various resources and efforts exerted on poverty-related programmes and schemes in the country, thus suggesting that the programmes and schemes were ineffective and ineffectual.

Skill Acquisition: In the same vein, the dependent variable was tested against skill acquisition among the beneficiaries in the area of study, and again the result revealed that there is no statistical significance between the two variables. Suggestions from the field revealed a situation where beneficiaries are not thoroughly exposed to the rudiments of the discipline to which they are attached. Moreover, the programme is limited to few discipline. The finding of this hypothesis is in line with Obadan (2017) conclusion that, low skills reduce labour force productivity and make investment less attractive, decreasing the transfer of technology and “know-how” from high-income countries. In his argument, Kirzner (1997) noted that although the entrepreneur may have identified the opportunities for new business, his ability or acquired skills needed to provide the required services is all he needs to realize the opportunities. Low skills also perpetuate poverty and inequality because the private sector cannot flourish in a country that doesn’t have a skilled workforce to sustain it. Low skills reduce labor force productivity and make investment less attractive, decreasing the transfer of technology and “know-how” from high-income countries. Low skills also perpetuate poverty and inequality because the private sector can’t flourish in a country that does not have a skilled workforce to sustain it.

CONCLUSION

The embarrassing paradox of poverty in the midst of stupendous assets in Nigeria suggests the compelling need for a single-minded pursuit of the objectives of poverty reduction, employment generation through skill acquisition. Without doubt, we can see that attempts were made by each programme to identify its target group under the successive administrations. These attempts notwithstanding, there is overlap of target and intervention strategies, lack of continuity of programmes and abandonment of projects before reaching their maturity. Poverty has weighty social consequences on the poor, the family and on the society. Once poverty is not broken, it breeds vicious cycle of poverty at higher level. Poverty causes lack of regard for constituted authority. Moreover, considering the current poverty rate in the country, one can conclude that poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria have not achieved much.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the findings of this study and its conclusions, the following recommendations have been made:

- a. The Economic policies of governments should be geared towards the creation of jobs.
- b. There is the need for an agreed poverty reduction agenda that can be used by all stakeholders be it Federal Government, State Government, Local Governments, NGOs and the International Donor Community.
- c. It is recommended that apprenticeship be integrated into the formal school system so that upon leaving secondary school, students/trainees would have already acquired basic skills in their chosen vocations. This no doubt, would increase their access to more vocational trainings.

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