Assessment of the Impact of N-Power Programme in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of N-Power programme on the economy of Nigeria with Akwa Ibom State as a case study. The paper identifies the categories of N-Power beneficiaries and the extent to which the policy influence on their economic life as well as the impediments of the N-power programme on the society. This study utilized the survey design and gather data from both the primary and secondary sources. Questionnaires were used to collect data, while key informant interview was used to complement the questionnaire. The Yamane’s formula for determining sample size was used to select 400 persons for the study. Stratified random sampling technique was adopted, where the entire target population was grouped into strata to reflect the beneficiaries of N-teach, beneficiary schools and the government officials. Data for the study were analysed using tables, figures and percentages for analysis of data. Findings reveal that the beneficiaries of N-Power programme were mostly composed of non-graduates which comprised secondary school leavers and other skill acquisition aspects followed by the N-Teach, Health strand, N-Agro and Voluntary Assets and Income Declaration Scheme (VAIDS) strands respectively. Though the programme has improved the standard of economic life of the beneficiaries through poverty reduction, proficiency skills in ICT, financial empowerment, on-the-job experience and investment in small scale businesses, delay in payment of allowance, unpaid allowances, distance to working places and lack of supervision has been the major impediments. The study, therefore, recommends prompt and timely payment of the stipends by Federal Government, timely resolution of problems of unpaid allowances, posting of beneficiaries nearest to place of residence and teacher education for N-Teach categories as well as proper supervision.

Keywords: N-power Programme; N-power beneficiaries, skill acquisition, financial empowerment, poverty reduction.
Introduction

Since independence six decades ago, Nigeria has never fallen short of dreams, visions, and platitudes of lofty programmes and public policy. One of such programmes in recent years is the N-Power, which is designed to provide a platform where most Nigerians can access skills acquisition and development. N-Power is the employability and enhancement programme of the Federal Government of Nigeria aimed at absorbing the learn-work entrepreneurship culture in youth between the ages of 18 to 35 (N-Power Information Guide, 2017). Applications for enrolment on the programme are done online to create a level playing field for everyone and to determine which applicants’ details would enable selection and direct payment through the bank accounts and Bank Verification Number (BVN) submitted. The linked programmes under N-Power will certify that each participant will learn and practice most of what is necessary to find or create work (Federal Government of Nigeria [FGN], 2018). The programme was implemented by the Federal Government of Nigeria in order to address the challenges of unemployment and to alleviate poverty among youth (Obadan, 2017).

Interestingly, N-power is linked to the Federal Government’s policies in the economic, employment and social development arenas. The scheme is created to address the challenges of youth unemployment by providing a structure for large scale and relevant work skills acquisition and development while linking its core and outcomes to fixing inadequate public services and stimulating the larger economy. Hence, N-power is a government policy that is geared towards addressing social problems in education, health, agriculture, poverty and even unemployment at all levels of government i.e. Federal, State and Local Governments (Obadan, 2017). The flexible programmes under N-power were designed to ensure that each participant learns and practises most of what is necessary to find or create work. The N-power Volunteer Corps involve a massive deployment of 500,000 trained graduates who will assist to improve the inadequacies in our public services such as education, health, technology and agriculture. Some of these graduates will also help in actualizing Nigeria’s economic and strategic aspirations of achieving food security and self-sufficiency (N-power, 2016).

By introducing N-Power, the Federal Government provides a platform not only for large-scale and relevant work skills acquisition and development; but also utilizing a large volunteer workforce to fix some of the problems in public services and stimulating the larger economy. Besides, N-Power is also a tool for diversifying the economy (Aderonmu, 2017). Particularly, N-Power Agro provides not only the means to apply knowledge and science to our farming practices, but also to gather data for effective planning. With the Non-Graduate category (N-Power Knowledge and N-Power Build), young Nigerians are trained to build a knowledge economy equipped with world-class skills and certification to become relevant in the domestic and global markets. N-Power also focuses on providing our non-graduates with relevant technical and business skills that enhance their work outlook and livelihood (FGN, 2018).

The participants in the system cut across youths in the various local government areas in Nigeria. One among them is Uyo local government which is equally the capital the State where numerous youths are empowered (Andrew, 2019). Uyo local government is in the major city of Akwa Ibom State and the area council consists cleans, wards and some villages. This study will, therefore, Assess N-Power Program on Beneficiaries’ Economic Life in Uyo Local Government with reference to N-Teach.

Statement of the Research Problem

Nigeria has the highest rates of youth unemployment in Sub-Saharan Africa. According to Odeh & Okoye (2014), rather than record remarkable progress in national socio-economic development due to her enormous wealth, Nigeria retrogressed to become the headquarters of
poverty of the world (World Watch, 2018). It remains the only member of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) that is categorized among the world's poorest twenty countries (Gbenyi, 2013). This misery and frustration of the citizenry foisted a state of hopelessness and the majority of the youths have resorted to any means including crime to succeed in life. To arrest these circumstances, there is the need for the training of educated men and women who can function effectively in their society in which they live in terms of self-employment and self-reliance. This is what N-Power programme is out to provide. Based on this premise, the study assesses the impact of N-Power Programmes on Beneficiaries’ Economic Life in Akwa Ibom State. The central objective of this study is to assess N-power programmes on beneficiaries’ economic life in Akwa Ibom. Specifically, the study identifies the categories of N-Power beneficiaries and the extent of influence on their Economic life as well as its impediments in Uyo Local Government. The hypothesis formulated to aid the extension of the study was to see the relationship between respondents’ perception of N-power programme and reduction in youth unemployment.

Conceptual Framework

The Concept of N-Power Programme

N-Power is a programme that provides a platform where most Nigerians can access skills acquisition and development. At this time however, the initial modular programmes in N-Power are designed for Nigerian citizens between the ages of 18 and 35. One needs to meet the minimum requirements (if any) for the respective programme. Generally, selection is based: On one’s expression of a genuine interest in whichever area you decide; passing the relevant tests; willingness to push beyond comfort zone; and ability to show flair to develop all the skills you need to be the best you can be (N-Power Information Guide, 2017). While there are fixed requirements along the way, we will be relying on you to take ownership of the process and take the lead in shaping your route, by making the most of the training that you will receive. For the purposes of N-Power, Graduate means any post-tertiary qualification including an Ordinary National Diploma (OND) or Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE) or as may be specified by the programme ((N-Power Information Guide, 2017).

The key N-Power Programmes include: N-Power Agro, N-Power Tax, N-Power Health, N-Power Teach. The N-Power Volunteer Corps is the post-tertiary engagement initiative for Nigerians between 18 and 35. It is a paid volunteering programme of a 2-year duration. The graduates will undertake their primary tasks in identified public services within their proximate communities. All N-Power Volunteers are entitled to computing devices that will contain information necessary for their specific engagement, as well as information for their continuous training and development. In 2016, the Federal Government engaged 200,000 N-Power Volunteers. In 2017, the Federal Government is enlisting 300,000 more. The June 2017 Application, is only open to the Graduate Category. N-Power volunteers provide teaching, instructional, and advisory solutions in 4 key areas (Bennel, 2017).

Skills and knowledge are the driving forces of economic growth and social development. Despite the current high level of unemployment, harnessing Nigeria’s young demography through appropriate skill development efforts provides an opportunity to achieve inclusion and productivity within the country. Large-scale skill development is the main policy thrust of the N-Power Programme. N-Power is also linked to the Federal Government’s policies in the economic, empowerment and social development arenas. N-Power addresses the challenge of youth unemployment by providing a structure for large scale and relevant work skills acquisition and development while linking its core and outcomes to fixing inadequate public services and stimulating the larger economy. The modular programmes under N-Power will ensure that each participant will learn and practice
most of what is necessary to find or create work. The N-Power Volunteer Corp involves a massive deployment of 500,000 trained graduates who will assist to improve the inadequacies in our public services in education, health and civic education. Some of these graduates will also help in actualizing Nigeria’s economic and strategic aspirations of achieving food security and self-sufficiency (Federal Ministry of Youth Development, 2017).

**N-Power Volunteer Corps (N-Teach Programme)** - The N-power Volunteer Corps is a post-tertiary engagement initiative for Nigerians between 18 and 35. It is a paid volunteering programme of two years duration. The graduates will undertake their primary tasks in identified public services within their proximate communities. All N-power volunteers are entitled to computing devices that will contain information necessary for their specific engagement, as well as information for their continuous training and development. In 2016, the Federal Government engaged 200,000 N-Power Volunteers. In 2007, the Federal Government enlisted 300,000 more. N-Power volunteers will provide teaching, instructional, and advisory solutions in 4 key areas.

**N-Power Agro** - N-Power Agro Volunteers provide advisory services to farmers across the country. They will disseminate the knowledge that has been aggregated by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development in the area of extension services. They will also gather data of Nigeria’s agriculture assets. Selection preference: Bachelor’s degree, HND or OND in Nutrition, Agricultural Sciences, Agricultural Economics, Agronomy, Animal Science, Crop Science, Food Science and Technology, and other agro related disciplines for duration of two years. Ultimately, N-Power Agro members can aspire to a life-long career in agriculture and other allied fields. Possible destinations include: Agriculture Extension Services Consultant, Seed fertilizer and other input aggregators, Farm managers, Public sector jobs in agriculture, Farming co-operatives management and Agro-entrepreneurship.

**N-Power Health** - Through the N-Power Health programme, young graduates formed part of the 500,000 N-Power Volunteer Corps. N-Power Health Volunteers will help improve and promote preventive healthcare in their communities to vulnerable members of the society including pregnant women and children and to families and individuals. Selection Preference, Bachelor's degree, HND, OND, in health sciences such as Medicine, Microbiology, Nursing, Public Health, Botany, Midwifery, Psychology or other allied disciplines in the sciences for two years. Ultimately, N-Power Health Volunteers can aspire to a life-long career in public health and other allied fields. Possible destinations include a health Education Specialist, Health Promotion Coordinator, Public Relations Manager, Breastfeeding Support Coordinator, Health Office Administrator, Health Research Analyst, Social Worker and Counselor, Health Services Manager, Health Department Administrator, Government Policy Analyst, Displaced Persons Coordinator, HIV/AIDS Educator, Project Manager in Public Health, Field Investigator, Research Analyst and Community Health Worker

**N-Power Teach** - The N-Power Teach programme engaged qualified graduates to help improve basic education delivery in Nigeria. N-power teach volunteers were deployed as teacher assistants in primary /secondary schools around Nigeria. They were to replace the current teachers, to work as support teachers across Nigeria, assisting with teaching, school management and other functions within the schools. Where possible, they also assist in providing basic education to children in marginalized communities. Selection preference, all post-tertiary graduates from all disciplines inclusive of OND and NCE qualifications. Ultimately, n-power teach volunteers can aspire to a life-long career in teaching or allied fields. Possible destinations include professional teaching, researcher, research associate,
senior research analyst, education consultant, associate, strategy consultant, education services manager, project manager, project supervisor, social services analyst.

**N-Power Tax** - The Federal Government seeks to encourage non-compliant and partially compliant taxpayers to come clean and declare and pay their appropriate tax due to the government. A minimum of 3,700 N-Power volunteers will be selected to work as community tax liaison officers to work in their state’s tax authorities. The N-Power community tax liaison officers will have the following key responsibilities which will include answering online inquiries, customer management, and creating awareness of tax compliance. Selection preference, Bachelor’s degree of Higher National Diploma (HND) in Economics, Law, Finance, Psychology and other allied disciplines in the social sciences. Essential: knowledge and experience: Good knowledge of Microsoft Office tools, Good written and spoken English, Good phone etiquette, Excellent analytical and diagnostic aptitude. Desirable: knowledge of tax laws and administration in Nigeria. Ultimately, N-Power Tax volunteers can aspire to a life-long career in finance or allied fields. Possible destinations include: Tax Assessor/Collector, Financial Analyst, Tax Auditor, Legal and Compliance Manager and Accountant

**N-Power Knowledge Programmes** - The N-Power Knowledge programme is the Federal Government’s first step towards diversifying to a knowledge economy. This programme will work alongside the planned eight innovation hubs across the country to provide incubation and acceleration of the technology and creative industries. The programme is a “Training to jobs” Initiative, essentially ensuring that participants can get engaged in the marketplace in an outsourcing capacity, as freelancers, as employees and as entrepreneurs.

**N-Power Creative** - The N-Power Creative programme trained and developed 5,000 young creative talents. The strategy was to put our creative industry on the global rader as exporters of the world-class services and content. Training lasted 3 months, made up of 1 month in-class and a 2-months hands-on group project, across selected Nigerian cities. The participants were trained and certified in one of the following courses: Animation, Graphic Design, Postproduction, and Script Writing. At the end of the training, some participants got local and international internship opportunities while others were linked to job and market opportunities. In addition, all participants received computing devices to ensure that they master their skills during and after the training. Selection preference, Unemployed graduates or non-graduates, between 18-35 years old. Basic illustration skills will be an advantage for animation and graphic arts, For script writing, creative writing skills and analytical writing skills will be an advantage , Problem solving skills, Ability to undertake self-tutorship, Detail-oriented, Analytical. Building/ Construction Project Management, Animator, Script Writer, Illustrator, Graphics Designer, Sound Editor, Film Editor, Visual Effects Artist, Game design, Desktop Publishing, Digital Media Publishing and Educational/Training Content Production.

**N-Power Tech Hardware** - The N-Power Tech for device technicians program will train and facilitate tooling for at least 10,000 technicians to boost the device serving and manufacturing industry. The output of this program will serve as a critical catalyst for the expansion of local capacity to service and produce mobile phones, tablets, computers and other relevant devices to serve the local and international market. Participants will undergo a hands-on training experience wherein they will be exposed to practical processes and tools to assemble and repair devices of varying specifications. At the end of the program, participants will be armed with the requisite technical skill to service devices in their local communities as well as work in a device assembly plant. The program will take 3 months of training and 1 month of assessment, graduation and setup. Participants will be advised on opportunities to acquire
tools to practice. Selection preference: Unemployed graduates or non-graduates, must be between 18-35 years old, problem solving skills, and ability to undertake self-tutorship. Job areas included: Assembly Plant Technician, Trainer, Device network technician, Device maintenance, and Device technician.

**N-Power Tech Software** - The N-Power Tech for developers programme were trained, tool and position 10,000 hands-on software developers for the local and international software development market. Participants undergo a project based model to training wherein they were exposed to foundational software development tools as well as resources to thrive as a modern day software developer entrepreneur. The programme seek to establish the foundation knowledge, tools and platform upon which participants can pursue a career as software development entrepreneurs. Training lasted 11 weeks and culminate with job fairs to link participants with placement opportunities within their respective localities. The programme also offers a continuity platform to support participants with learning and engagement opportunities on a continuous basis. Selection preference included; Unemployed graduates or non-graduates, between 18-35 years old, Problem solving skills, Ability to undertake self-tutorship, Detail-oriented, Analytical while Job area includes, App Developer, Game Developer, Web Developer, Computer System Analyst, Systems Software Developer, Software Tester, and Trainer.

**N-Power Build** - The N-Power Build is an accelerated training and certification (skills to job) programme that was to engage and train 75,000 young unemployed Nigerians in order to build a new crop of skilled and highly competent workforce of technicians, artisans and service professionals. The focus industries include: Building Services, Construction, Built Environment Services, Utilities, Automotive, Aluminum and Gas. Selection preference, Unemployed youth, No degree or diploma, Aged between 18-35, Interest in fixing, Building and creating things. Duration: 3 Months. N-Power Build members can aspire to a career in construction, works and housing. Possible destinations include: Building/Construction Project Management, Furniture Making and Design, Electrical Maintenance and Repairs Services, Plumbing and Welding.

**Review of Empirical Literature**

In recent times many researchers have studied government policies and programmes on poverty, unemployment and youth related topics based on experiences and observation of facts. However, some related empirical literatures reviewed in this section are with the aim of identifying the missing gap in the works of previous researchers that necessitated this study. Bison (2019) conducted a study on impact Assessment of the N-power Scheme: A Study of Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State. The objectives of this study were to examine the impact of the N power scheme in employment generation, economic wellbeing of beneficiaries and job skills enhancement of beneficiaries in the Cross River south senatorial district. The research design adopted for this study was the survey design. The researcher adopted the purposive sampling technique in selecting sample from the population of study. Sample sizes of two hundred and fifty (250) respondents were selected for the study. The hypotheses that were stated for study were tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The analysis was run on the Statistical Package for social science (SPSS). The results of the study indicated that there is a positive significant relationship between the N power scheme and the following variables, economic wellbeing, job skillenhancement and employment generation. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that Government should introduce mandatory training and workshops in areas such as ICT and agriculture for volunteers to increase their employability after the expiration of the scheme.
In a related development, Akujuru and Enyioko (2019) conducted a study on the impact of N-power Programmes on poverty alleviation in Nigeria: a study of Rivers State. The study aimed to examine the impact of N-Power programmes on poverty alleviation in Nigeria. Survey design was used in this study to generate data. A sample of 400 respondent youths was studied. After going through them 381 copies (i.e. 95.25% response rate) were found useful for the data analysis. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze data in this study. Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation Co-efficient (r) was used to test the hypotheses. The study found that the major N-Power programmes used towards Poverty alleviation in Rivers State included: N-Power Teach, N-Power Build, N-Power Creative, N-Power Agro, N-Power Tech Software N-Power Tax, N-Power Health and N-Power Tech Hardware. The study revealed that N-Power Programmes’ beneficiaries were mainly university and polytechnic graduates. The study found that the major factors that affected the implementation of N-Power programmes included: Insufficient information, non-payment of stipend to participants as at when due, bribery and corruption, wrong bank verification number (BVN), and overbearing hands of politicians in the programme etc. It is evident and conclusive that: There is a significant relationship between N-Power programmes and poverty alleviation in Rivers State and there is a significant relationship between N-Power programmes and the empowerment of the youths in Rivers State. The study recommended that the authorities concerned should promote rural development through N-Power programmes. Also, the government at all levels should reactivate moribund industries and enterprises and expand the horizon of N-Power programmes in that direction.

It is pertinent to note that all the studies conducted have been able to establish the significance of government policies and programmes on beneficiaries in Nigeria. Although most studies conducted cover other programmes. Only a few studies focused on the N-power programme. This study was conducted to purposively assess the impact of N-power and socio-economic development in Akwa Ibom State. Besides, most of the above-mentioned works used another inferential tool of hypothesis testing, this study uses Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation Co-efficient (r) for data analysis and interpretation. The theoretical framework also differs from the works examined above. It has a different theoretical contribution where two theories- system theory and structural functionalism theory were reviewed and Structural Functionalism theory was adopted. Geographically, all the above studies conducted did not clearly and adequately focus on the Akwa Ibom state. This study therefore attempts to fill that gap by focusing on Akwa Ibom State which had experienced the adverse effect of youth unemployment.

**Theoretical Framework**

The study adopts the system and structural-functional theories as the framework for analysis. The system theory is an approach that sees an organization or society as a dynamic open system or as an entity consisting of a set of elements in interaction with one another which maintains itself in a state of relatively stable equilibrium by experiencing a dynamic and constant interchange of energy and information with its environment (Makinde, 2004). Systems theory views social organizations as a complex set of dynamically intentioned and interconnected elements. Every system includes inputs, processes, outputs, feedback and the environment in which it operates and with which it continuously interacts. In relating system theory to this study, it views government as a system with input coming from the masses in the form of demands for empowerment schemes for self-reliance and increases in status as well as job creation by the government for the overall benefit of the youth. The government serves as the processing unit which takes input information of demands from the people for employment and empowerment schemes, processes them and sends outputs which are the N-power scheme geared towards job creation, skill acquisition scheme and poverty reduction.
among the youth. The theory shows how the government react to people’s flight in terms of the provision of the necessities of life. The theory highlights the demands of the people as presented to the government, government actions on the said demands and the output is the program that will enhance the well-being of the people.

Alternatively, the structural functionalism approach sees the system as a structure existing with some functions (including distributive function) to carry out. It is expected that it will help to ascertain the N-Power Programme and socio-economic development in Akwa Ibom State. N-Power is seen as a structure meant to perform some distributive functions targeted at closing the yawning gap of poverty in the State. Functionalism has its roots in the organicism (Comte) of the early 19th century. The organicism of Comte (and later that of Spencer and Durkheim) influenced the functional Anthropologists Malinowski and Redcliffe Brown. Durkheim's timeless analysis and Weber's emphasis on social taxonomies (ideal types) began to shape modern/contemporary structural perspective while Talcott Parsons (1937) developed the Social Systemic Functionalism which identified the structure of social action. These aforementioned scholars are regarded as the great proponents of this theory.

Structural Functionalism is a sociological theory that attempts to explain why society functions the way it does by focusing on the relationships among the various social institutions that make up society (e.g., government, law, education, religion, etc.). This theory sees society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability. It asserts that individuals’ lives are guided by social structures, which are relatively stable patterns of social behaviour. Social structures give shape to our lives - for example, in families, the community, and through religious organizations. And certain rituals, such as a handshake or complex religious ceremonies, give structure to our everyday lives. Each social structure has social functions or consequences for the operation of society as a whole. Education, for example, has several important functions in a society, such as socialization, and learning. Concerning the area of interest, which is poverty eradication in terms of economic empowerment and the provision of social and personal well-being, the functionalist perspective argues that the issue of unemployment in Nigeria emanates from the apparent imbalances in the country.

There is an argument that the pressure on certain people to meet the challenges of satisfying their economic needs tends to push them to certain anti-social behaviours. To mitigate this situation, the N-Power Programme becomes the function through which the state can attempt to bring about cohesion and harmony by distributing resources to the poor (unemployed graduates) to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor. The theory applies to the phenomenon of study by identifying the N-Power programme as a structure functional for societal harmony. However, the scheme cannot exist without challenges because some individuals are social deviants who may bring about irregular and negative changes. The challenges may be in the form of corruption, technical issues, favouritism and nepotism, among others. Nevertheless, the programme is likely to have a great impact on the economic and social lives of individuals. The impact can be felt in the skills provided towards making the beneficiaries useful to themselves and society at large. This implies that when an individual is empowered, his household becomes empowered and this will make it possible to provide food for the family and this will help to stabilize the family institution. Again, the stability in the family in an institution will positively affect other institutions like legal, political, economic, religious, education, and health among others. The reason for this is the interconnectedness, interrelatedness and interdependence of the social elements. This will, therefore, help to prevent all sorts of criminality like rape, armed robbery, murder, alcoholism, drug abuse and human trafficking, among others.

The strength of the theory in explaining the impacts and the problems affecting the implementation of the N-power programme does not mean that it is free from criticism. The
theory claims that the scheme is for vulnerable individuals but the reverse is the case as individuals who are working for instance in two or three different places are still employed under the scheme. This implies that the programme is not reaching its target. More so, the theory has its weakness of being inadequate in the provision of explanation to the phenomenon under study. The resources earmarked for the programme are embezzled by officials of the scheme. This implies that the purpose of the scheme is defeated and in solving a particular problem, more problems emanate. In other words, the theory cannot holistically solve all human problems.

Methods and Materials
The study relies on both primary and secondary tools of data collection. The primary source of data used in this research includes questionnaires and interviews; these are used to obtain first-hand information. This study utilized the survey design. Yamane’s formula for determining sample size was used to select 400 persons for the study. A stratified random sampling technique was adopted, where the entire target population was grouped into strata to reflect the beneficiaries of N-teach, beneficiary schools and government officials. A purposive sampling technique was also used to select respondents whose responses assisted in the study. However, the sample was drawn using the simple random sampling technique. This is to allow a respondent to be handpicked from a pool of beneficiaries of the N-teach, the beneficiary schools and the Government officials from the selected Local Government Areas.

Data Presentation and Analysis
Questionnaires were distributed disproportionately to the beneficiaries of N-teach, beneficiary schools and staff representing the Government Officials

Table 1: Population and Sample Size of Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Target Population</th>
<th>No. Of Beneficiaries and Non-Beneficiaries /Government Officials</th>
<th>No. Of Questionnaires</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Akwa Ibom State Beneficiaries 40</td>
<td>2486</td>
<td>383</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Beneficiary School</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Government Officials/N-Power Staff</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Teachers’ Service Commission Staff</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>LEA principal Staff from Uyo LGA</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>2598</strong></td>
<td><strong>400</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Work, 2023

Results and Discussion
This research combines content analysis, descriptive and inferential analysis respectively. The content analysis was used to analyze secondary data. The data obtained via primary sources were presented with the aid of descriptive statistics. These include tables and percentages. In addition, the Pearson Chi-square tool of analysis was also used for testing the independence of the responses on some other variables of interest. The Statistical Packages
for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 was used to run the relationship between the hypotheses at all levels of the analyses which include the estimation of the mean scores and the Pearson Chi-square coefficient. The categories of N-Power beneficiaries are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Categories of N-Power Beneficiaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Categories of Beneficiaries</th>
<th>Frequencies</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Schools</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>N-Power Staff</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Teachers Service Commission Staff</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Local Education Authority Staff</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Others (Non-graduates, Skill-based, etc.</td>
<td>2486</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>2598</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Work, 2023

Table 2 shows the categories of N-Power beneficiaries in Akwa Ibom which comprises non-graduates and skill acquisition (2486), beneficiary schools (32), N-power staff (15), Teachers Service Commission (20), and Local Education Authority (45). This implies that virtually all the categories of youths were involved in the programme. The above finding seems to justify the engagement and the objective for which the programme was created. The above finding appears to agree with Odey and Sambe (2019) study which found that N-Power contributed to the empowerment of youth through poverty reduction, proficiency skills in ICT, financial empowerment, on-the-job experience and investment in small-scale businesses among youths in Cross River State. Table 3 is the analysis of the influence of the programme on beneficiaries.

Table 3: N-Power Influence on Beneficiaries’ Economic Life

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>REMARKS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>N-Power scheme has not provided employment opportunities to youth that were unemployed in Akwa Ibom State</td>
<td>1.875</td>
<td>Disagreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>N-Power scheme has not provided means of earning income for youths who had no means of livelihood</td>
<td>3.3475</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>N-Power scheme has not provided idle youth opportunities for productive engagements/activities</td>
<td>3.3875</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>N-Power scheme is not an effective public policy in curbing youth unemployment in Akwa Ibom State.</td>
<td>1.7925</td>
<td>Disagreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>N-Power scheme has improved the standard of living of the beneficiaries in Akwa Ibom State</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Work, (2023) Note: \( \chi = \text{Mean}, \chi \geq 2.5 = \text{agreed}, \chi < 2.5 = \text{disagreed} \)
From the opinion of respondents, 1.875 disagreed that the N-Power programme has not provided employment opportunities to youths who were unemployed in Akwa Ibom. This could be due to the nature of its temporariness and duration as the person will still return to his or her financial status after the scheme. 3.3475 agreed that the N-Power scheme has not provided earning income for youths who have no means of livelihood probably because of its instability. In the same line, 3.4725 agreed that the N-Power scheme has not provided idle youth opportunities for productive engaging activities. Furthermore, 1.7925 disagreed that the N-Power scheme is not an effective public policy in curbing youth unemployment in Akwa Ibom State. Although, 3.32 respondents agree that the N-Power scheme has improved the standard of living of beneficiaries in Akwa Ibom. The study coincided in view with Isyak & Omale (2020) on the effect of the N-Power scheme on youth empowerment in Anyigba, Dekina Local Government Area of Kogi State. The study found that the N-Power scheme has to a very large extent empowered the youths in Anyigba in skills acquisition, financial status, self-reliance and productivity among the youth.

**Impediments to the N-power scheme in Akwa Ibom State**

Figure 1 presents the challenges of the N-Power programme in Akwa Ibom. The data above indicated (45%) of the respondents acknowledged delay in payment of allowances as one of the challenges, while (21%) of the beneficiaries identified administrative bottleneck as part of the challenge of the programme. In addition, (13%) of respondents identified corrupt practices of various kinds to be another challenge of the scheme, while others (3%, 5%), (6%) and (4%) aired their view on wrong deployment, distance to place of assignment, lack of proper supervision, corrupt practices etc. as part of the challenges. Some of these difficulties are comparable to the ones found by Ayub, Olalekan, Gbaa, Asombo & George (2020). The study found that the programme has had enormous impacts on the socio-economic livelihoods of the beneficiaries including easy access to basic and daily needs, catering for relatives, ability to enrol for further studies, etc. Findings revealed that delays in payments, and lack of continuity, among others, were challenges associated with the programme.

Figure 1: Impediments to the Success of N-Power Scheme in Akwa Ibom State

**Source:** Field Work, 2023
Note:
DPS - Delay in Payment of Allowance,
DPP - Distance to Primary Place of Assignment,
ABT - Administrative Bottleneck,
ABS - Absenteeism of Beneficiaries,
CPS - Corrupt Practices,
IAB - Indifference Attitude of Beneficiaries,
LPS - Lack of Proper Supervision,
WDP - Wrong Deployment to Primary Place of Assignment

Discussion of Findings
The first hypothesis sought to test if there is a significant difference in the opinion of the respondents on their perception that the N-Power scheme has not reduced the rate of youth unemployment in Akwa Ibom State. The result of the test of the hypothesis shows that there is a significant difference in the opinion of the respondents on their perception that the N-power scheme has not reduced the rate of youth unemployment in Akwa Ibom State. In other words, respondents’ status i.e. beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of the scheme influenced their responses on the subject matter. This finding is corroborated by the revelation from an informal discussion with some of the N-Power beneficiaries. According to them, the scheme has made them not to be idle providing them with opportunities for productive engaging activities. Some further acknowledged that beyond the knowledge and experience gained by being engaged to teach under the scheme, they were able to save some small resources earned to start and improve their small-scale businesses. Other respondents believe that even if a single person was recruited by the scheme, it has made an impact talk more of having thousands of beneficiaries. This finding is further corroborated by the statistics of unemployment in Akwa Ibom state. According to Akwa Ibom State Bureau of Statistics (2021), Akwa Ibom State has a total population of 9627 who were unemployed graduates out of which 2598 were gainfully but temporarily employed by the N-Power scheme.

The reality of the finding of this study is that jobs are not freely available, especially in Nigeria where unemployment is high. This is in line with Sachs (2005) who opines that the current practice is to take what is available, which might mean accepting anything that will serve as a source of income. Sachs (2005) also submits that only a third of the urban dwellers found jobs reflecting their aspirations before leaving school. According to the UN World Youth Report (2015), the decrease in the availability of jobs might lead to an increase in compromises in a person’s values especially on family issues. This could lead to reshaping one’s needs and values to fit into any available circumstances and thereby accepting anything obtainable.

However, respondents who are non-beneficiaries looked at the scheme from a different perspective i.e. in terms of non-continuity by successive governments. This again is in line with an informal discussion with some of the government officials who believe that the N-Power is just a scheme like any other government programmes which could hardly stand the test of time. One of them states that the scheme is not something to be celebrated, because it only provides temporary employment to only a limited number of people, looking at the level of unemployment in society and the increasing number of graduates that are coming out of tertiary institutions year in year out. He further stated that, if the government is serious about reducing the rate of unemployment in Nigeria, the government should increase
the number of its beneficiaries and transform them from volunteers to permanent staff with a commensurate payment.

The result of the test of the second hypothesis also shows that there is a significant difference in the opinion of the respondents on their perception that the N-Power scheme has not reduced the burden of the state government in providing manpower for beneficiary schools. Like the first hypothesis; the result of the test of the second hypothesis means that respondents differ in their perception based on their status. According to the respondents, the scheme has increased the number of teachers in the beneficiary schools. This finding is in harmony with the available data from the Akwa Ibom State N-Power office, which revealed that between the years of 2016 to 2019, the scheme deployed a total number of 6,618 beneficiaries. This finding is in agreement with an informal discussion held with some of the N-Power beneficiaries. According to them “when they came in, the school didn’t have enough teachers, and so our deployment helped a great deal; this has been a good experience because as we teach the students, we also learn from them as well”. Some of the staff of the beneficiary schools confirmed this by alluding to the fact that before the coming of the N-Power beneficiaries to their schools, there were not enough teachers and as such forcing them to take a whole arm of a class up to two-three arms which made their performance to diminish.

However, with the coming of the beneficiaries, the arms were broken into smaller cells, thereby making them perform better in their service delivery. This finding is supported by the testimonies of some beneficiaries, one of them said “I teach primary three pupils who are mostly from the Uyo community and could not comprehend well in English, but since I assumed duty, I have made a lot of positive impact on the lives of these pupils’. This finding is in tandem with that of Aderonmu (2017), who alluded that the N-Power Teach Programme engages graduates for the benefit of basic education delivery in Nigeria which has increased the number of teachers in public schools and also improved the service delivery. He added that they are not to replace the current teachers, but are to work as support teachers, assisting with teaching, school management and other functions within the schools. However, this has not in any way delimitcd the power of state government, especially in terms of teachers’ recruitment and payment of salaries.

However, the non-beneficiary respondents believe that the scheme has not in any way reduced the burden of the state government. This means that even though the scheme has provided additional personnel, provided adequate teachers and also improved the quality of teaching in public schools, the running cost the state government is using to pay teachers’ salaries and to run other expenses (the office equipment’) has not stopped or even decreased on the account of the coming of the N-Power scheme. In the same vein, other respondents stated that the state government is not in any way feeling the impact of the scheme because it has not reduced the burden of the state government in terms of reducing the running cost of the government. This is a mystery that requires further investigation to unravel. The result of the test of the third hypothesis shows that there is a significant difference in the opinion of the respondents on their perception that administrative factor does not constitute a major challenge to the effective implementation of the N-Power scheme. It is justifiable to say there is a significant difference in the perception of the respondents. For the beneficiaries, a major administrative factor confronting the effective implementation of the scheme is the delay in payment of monthly allowances.

The delay in the payment of allowances is a major challenge to the implementation of the N-Power scheme in Akwa Ibom State which has made the beneficiaries develop a bad attitude towards the scheme and made them display some form of absenteeism at their designated schools. This finding is corroborated by the revelation from an informal discussion with one of the respondents who spends N80-100 or above daily on transportation
to work, and their stipend has not been paid for months. In addition, some are indebted to their neighbours who usually assist them out of financial difficulties in the hope that they would defray the same once their stipends are paid. A good number of the beneficiaries are frustrated because their expectations have yet to be met. In the same vein, the findings also agreed with Odey & Sambe (2019) who outline delayed and unpaid allowances as some of the challenges affecting the effective implementation of the N-Power scheme. On the other hand, the non-beneficiaries identified the poor attitude and absenteeism of the beneficiaries from their designated schools and administrative bottlenecks at the N-Power office as major challenges to the success of the N-Power programme in Akwa Ibom State.

Conclusion

Government in every political system exists and operates on behalf of the people. Thus, a good government cannot be active in addressing societal problems without articulating public policy in dealing with issues affecting society. Indeed, the N-Power scheme is a government programme that is geared toward managing and reducing the rate of youth unemployment in Nigeria but one can only say that the scheme has performed fairly well in achieving its objectives. In addition, youth empowerment and poverty reduction are central or critically linked to national peace and security. The youths are the most energetic and active members of the entire society, so their contributions and role in national development and security cannot be overstated. However, it is evident that successive governments at the Federal, State and Local levels have not given youth empowerment the proper attention it deserves, hence the high levels of threat to national security in the country from internal sources.

Recommendations

Given the findings of this research, the following recommendations are made:

1. The study recommends that the government, philanthropists and the well-to-do in the society should come in partnership with the public and private sector to fund and expand the scheme thereby increasing the number of beneficiaries to enhance the impact of the scheme on unemployment in the country.

2. The study also recommends that the Federal Government should review the scheme in such a way that it will accommodate the unemployed graduates thereby transforming the volunteers to permanent staff with a commensurate payment.

3. The Federal Government should ensure prompt and timely payment of stipends to beneficiaries of the scheme and should ensure that beneficiaries who have issues that affect the payment of their allowances are timely and judiciously treated to solve problems of unpaid allowances.

References


