

ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF N-POWER PROGRAMME ON POVERTY REDUCTION AMONG BENEFICIARIES IN GOMBE STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

In response to the increasing rate of poverty/unemployment in Nigeria, the Federal Government of Nigeria introduced N-Power empowerment programme aimed at lifting millions of Nigerians out of poverty. The central problem which the study addressed was assessing the extent to which the N-Power programme impacted on poverty reduction in Kaduna and kano states. The objectives of the study where to examine the extent to which N-Power funding affect youth employment and poverty reduction in Gombe State. The Meta theory of Empowerment developed by Elisheva Seedam and translated by Flanze was adopted as theoretical framework for the study. The research design adopted was mixed method design by John W. Creswell and data were generated from both primary and secondary sources, with questionnaires, interviews, and observations as the instrument for primary data generation and were analyzed using both descriptive and statistical analysis/multiple regression analysis using statistical package for Social Scientist [SPSS] for the test of hypotheses. The study found that funding of N-Power programme has a significant positive effect on youth empowerment and poverty reduction in Gombe State. Consequently, it was therefore recommended that, N-Power funding should be revisited with a view to ensuring prompt payment of monthly stipends to the beneficiaries in the study state.

Keywords: N-Power, Poverty reduction, Youth employment

Introduction

Poverty is a worldwide social problem that attracts the attention of international community, government and non-governmental agencies including African scholars, and policy makers. The concept of poverty and material deprivation is a critical one in contemporary social discussions. The poor are materially deprived, socially alienated and politically excommunicated. Thus, the poor are conceived as those individuals or households in a particular society, incapable of purchasing a specified basket of basic goods and services such as food, water, shelter, health care, access to productive resources including education,

working skills and tools, political and civil rights to participate in decisions concerning socio-economic conditions. It is generally agreed that in conceptualizing poverty, low income or low consumption is its symptom.

The level of poverty in Nigeria since the implementation of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in the 80s has tremendously increased (UNDP Nigeria, 1998; FOS, 1999; World Bank,

1999). The poverty profile in Nigeria showed that the incidence of poverty increased from 28.1% in 1980 to 43.6% in 1985, but declined to 42.7% in 1992 and rose again to 65.6% in 1996 (FOS, 1999). The UNDP Human Development Indices (HDI for 2001) ranked Nigeria the 142 with HDI of 0.40 among the poorest countries in the world. The situation even grew worse 18 years later when in 2019 the HDI report ranked Nigeria 161 with HDI value of 0.539 (Human Development Report, 2020).

In recognition of the high poverty and unemployment levels in the country, the current administration established what is considered by many as an explicit social intervention policy called the National Social Investment Programmes (N-SIP) since June, 2016. The policy is meant to cushion the effect of hardship caused by the prevalent poverty in the polity. The said policy is schemed in four stand-alone programmed that are designed to provide skills, income flow, cheap capital and food security. Specifically, these programmed are: the N-Power programme, the conditional Cash Transfer Programme (CCT), the Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEE) and the Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSF).

Earlier announced in 2015 and officially kick-started in December 2016, the N-Power was established as a manpower development programme to harness Nigeria's demography through appropriate skills development efforts to provide an opportunity to achieve inclusion and productivity within the country. It further seeks to achieve accelerated development through poverty reduction, socio-economic development via efficient utilization of natural resources. N-Power programme which is for young Nigerian between the age of 18-35 is an intervention programme meant to address the challenges of youth unemployment by providing structure for large scale and relevant work skills acquisition and development, while linking it core and outcomes to fixing inadequate public services, and stimulating the larger economy.

N-Power volunteer involves a massive deployment of 500,000 trained graduates who will assist in improving the inadequacies in the public services in education, health and civic education (FOS, 2018). The N-Power Programme is designed to train Nigerian youths (graduate and non-graduate) on different fields with a token fee of N30, 000.00 each for two years. The graduate's category is divided into three areas namely, N-Agro, N-Health, N-Teach and for the non-graduates' category, there is N-Build Scheme. The totality of the beneficiaries would provide teaching, instructional, and advisory solutions according to the programmer's category in which they are placed.

The N-Agro beneficiaries would work in the agricultural sector of the economy functioning as intermediaries between research and farmers. They operate as facilitators and communicators, helping farmers in their decision-making and ensuring that appropriate knowledge is implemented to obtain the best results on farms. N-Health beneficiaries are meant to serve as public health assistance teaching preventive health to community members in the primary healthcare centers especially pregnant women, children, families and individuals. For their background in health-related academic fields, they are also trained to provide basic diagnostic services (Aderonmu, 2017). Against this background, this study intends to assess the implementation of N-Power programme on poverty reduction among the beneficiaries in Gombe State. Clearly, curbing the high rate of poverty and unemployment, economic wastages such as excessive loss of output which manifested in a reduction of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and gross underutilization of human resources were among the reasons given for the establishment of N-Power programme.

The N-Power programme is set 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 (Nwoabi, 2019). According Kabeer (2018), the objectives of the programme include reducing the rate of unemployment in the country, facilitating the transfer of entrepreneurial and technical skills, boosting employability status of the beneficiaries and bringing solution to active public service and government diversification policy. In spite the commendation received from various stakeholders, the programme is bedeviled by multiple challenges notably issue of funding which this research intends to address. Funding has been cited as one of the problems bedeviling the successful operation of N-Power and other components of National Social Investment Programme (NSIP) in Nigeria. The National Director of NSIP reveals that only 15.8 percent of the 2016 and 2017 appropriation for the programme was released Wakili, 2018; Guardian 20 February, 2018). Also, only N300 billion out of the budgeted N1.5 trillion has been utilized for running the programme.

Therefore, appropriation without release and actual cash backing make effective project execution impossible. This is buttressed by the theory of public policy implementation by Meter and Horn (2002) which identified available resources as critical in policy implementation. However, this paper intends to ask that to what extent has funding of N-Power programme affect the incidence of poverty among the beneficiaries in Gombe State? And the main objective of the studies is to examine the extent to which funding of N-Power programme affects poverty reduction among beneficiaries in Gombe State. Various studies have been carried out in relation to N-Power programme and poverty reduction in Nigeria. Therefore, the study confined itself in some specific areas and ignored wider range of poverty reduction of which this study tends to fill. Thus, this research work seeks to assess the implementation of N-Power programme on poverty reduction among beneficiaries in Gombe State.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Concept of N-Power Programme

N-Power aspires to provide a platform where most Nigerians can access skills acquisition and development. At this time however, the initial modular programmed in N-Power are designed for Nigerian citizens between the ages of 18 and 35. One needs to meet the minimum requirement (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 a flair to develop all the skills you need to be the best you can be (Aderonmu, 2017).

While there are fixed requirements along 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 (Oba, 2017). The N-Power Volunteer Corps is the post-tertiary engagement initiative for Nigerian between 18 and 35. It is a paid volunteering programme of 2-year duration. The graduates will undertake their primary tasks I 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 20017 Application is only open to the Graduate Category-the N-Power Volunteer Corps. N-Power

volunteers provide teaching, instructional, and advisory solutions in 4 key areas (Bennel, 2018).

However, skills and knowledge are 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-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 programs 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 inn education, health and civic 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).

Perhaps to further demonstrate the fact that it was aimed at addressing the challenges of empowerment, its forerunners categorized it into Graduate Teachers Corps which targeted 500,000 graduates' recruitment. N-Power knowledge is targeting 25,000 non-graduates' recruitment and N-Power Build which targets 75,000 non-graduates' recruitment. It was gathered that the 500,000 graduates under the N-Power Corps programme will get the computing devices that will contain information necessary for their specific engagement, as well as information for their continuous training and development. Participants are to provide teaching, instructional, and advisory solutions in 4 key areas namely agriculture, health, power tech and community education (Obadan, 2017).

The N-Power agro-volunteers are meant to function as intermediaries between research and farmers. They operate as facilitators and communicators, helping farmers in their decision-making and ensuring that appropriate knowledge is implemented to obtain the best result on farms. Through the N-Power Health programme, young graduates who form part of the 500,000 N-Power Corps members are trained to work as public health assistants. They teach preventive health to community members including pregnant women, children, families and individuals. They are also trained to provide basic diagnostic services (Aderonmu, 2017).

The N-Power teach programme engages qualified graduates for the benefit of basic education delivery in Nigeria. They are not to deployed as teaching assistants in primary and secondary schools across Nigeria. 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. They assist in taking basic education to children in marginalized communities (Aderonmu, 2017). Indeed, the programme is carefully designed in such a manner that if well implemented, can help in further addressing the challenges of empowerment and subsequently, reduce poverty among the youths. But then of course, there appears to be some confusion of some sort in the way and manner, the programme is being handled. The programme could not kick off in most states as scheduled. Some of the controversies included the fact that the names released so far are reportedly fraught with 'ghost names' (Bethel, 2017).

Funding of N-Power Programme

N-Power and other social investments programmed developed under the watch of President Buhari are intervention programmed aimed to lift millions of Nigerians out of poverty and create a platform for employability among the teaming youths. The programme is fully funded by the Federal Government of Nigeria as disclosed by the President that “National Social Investment Programmes are funded with billions of naira from its inception to-date as a government mechanism to help provide necessary buffers and shield to millions of Nigerians who are exposed to the widespread economic vulnerabilities”. He further stressed that “In furtherance of our inclusiveness agenda, the sum of N420 billion has been provided to sustain the social investment programmed, while 20 billion has also been set aside for the family homes and our Social Housing Programmes”. Under the N-Power programme, the first batch of 200,000 participants are to be paid N30,000 a month and deployed by the respective state governments and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) to their different places of assignment, including classrooms as teachers (Federal Ministry of Youth Development, 2009). But some months into the programme, it has started facing different challenges with about 13,000 participants alleging that they have not been paid their monthly stipend (Aderonmu, 2017).

The Nigerian Interbank System (NIBSS), which provides the technical support for the programme has identified sundry challenges, including failure on the part of the beneficiaries to input correct Bank Verification Numbers (BVN) and other details to match the information initially provided for processing. Funmi Olowosolu, a participant who was posted to LGEA primary school, Lokoguma, Kogi state, where she teaches, is yet to receive her monthly stipend of N30,000 three months after enrolling in the programme, because of inconsistency in her personal details, as well as her Bank Verification Number (BVN) (Bethel, 2017). This clearly indicated that, Federal Government is the sole financier of N-Power programme.

Concept of Poverty

Poverty is interpreted broadly as lacking the basic means to live in dignity: A multidimensional understanding of poverty helps us define poverty as a human condition characterized by sustained or chronic deprivation of the resources, capabilities, choices, security, and power necessary for enjoyment of an adequate standard of living and other civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights (Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2002). Poverty as a subject attracts several definitions from the different scholars. For the purpose of this study, we shall adopt some definitions with inherent universal attributes, which address poverty issues in relation to the subject of discourse. The World Bank (2017) defines poverty as per capita income of less than 2.150 calories per day. This should however be accepted conditionally, considering that the value of one dollar varies from region to region. Suffice to say that one dollar may provide minimal food requirements in a country with abundant sources of food, while it may not in another region, which relies on imports for her food supply.

Umar (2012) sees poverty as debilitating that its eradication becomes extremely difficult if not impossible. Thus, both individuals and societies would like to avoid it like a plague. This is probably why since the nineteenth century, policy makers and academicians in the developed world have persistently concerned themselves with how to eliminate or at least reduce poverty, though so far with no success. This must have connection with the poor implementation of policies and programmed designed to tackle poverty issues across the globe.

Poverty as Subsistence

It concerned with the minimum of provision needed to maintain health and working capacity. The

subsistence definition described poverty objectively as lack of income needed to acquire the minimum necessity of life. Those who lack the necessities to sustain life are described as poor. However, there are difficulties in determining what constitutes 'minimum' which should be the dividing line separating the poor from the rich (Odomosu, 1999).

Poverty as Social Inequality

Inequality in this case is concerned with the relative position of income group to each other. Poverty cannot be understood in isolating the poor and treating them as a group. Society is seen as a series of stratified income layers and poverty is concerned with how the bottom layers fare in relation to the society as a whole. Inequality is determined by standing the living standard of the rich in relation to the poor. The unfairness and injustice of unequal distribution of resources has led to countless attempts to explain this phenomenon. Social inequality affects career development of individuals, and the effect of social institutions such as family, home, and occupational structure must be taken into account but a way of explaining this factor gives way to viewing it from sociological perspectives (Odomosu, 1999).

Challenges of N-Power Programme on Poverty Reduction in Nigeria

Challenges of N-Power programme in ensuring youth employment vis-à-vis poverty reduction in Nigeria have been identified by few studies. A study conducted by Abin (2018) revealed that some of the problems faced by the programme included unpaid and late payment of stipend to volunteers. Other challenge noted was the over centralization of the programme. This has the tendency to effect interaction between beneficiaries and authorities who control the programme and limit possibility of improving the scheme through understanding plights of beneficiaries. A study by Okoro and Bassey (2018) noted that the programme did not provide teacher education to volunteers before deployment in the N-Teach strand. This implies that such volunteers were not empowered to take up the teaching profession by the programme before deploying them.

Generally, empowerment has assumed wide application most recently, even though it is not a new wind, having arisen in the mid – 17th century with legalistic meaning “to invest with authority, “authorize”. It infers that individuals in society could be to attain higher and better living standards, while the development of the community made up of empowered individual could also be enhanced.

Theoretical Framework

Meta theory of empowerment developed by Elisheva Seedam translated by Flanze (1997) was used and adopted as a theoretical framework for this study. The theory of empowerment therefore sufficiently explains this study centered on the Assessment of the implementation of N-Power programme on poverty reduction among the beneficiaries in Gombe State.

Critique of Meta Theory of Empowerment

Meta Theory of Empowerment like many of the theories is Eurocentric and un-African in content and context which used and applied in the western world of which their norms, tradition and values vary with the Africans. Though, the central theme of the theory centered on how individual or community could be empowered to be self-reliance. So even with the above stated reasons, the theory suit and fitted this research work.

Research Methodology

This research adopts mixed method design by John W. Cresswell as the work used both quantitative and qualitative data in its analysis. The design gives direction to the study and for this

reason, it is most appropriate in making generalization. Hence vital views of the respondents on N-Power poverty reduction program was captured using mixed method. 350 was the sample size using Morgan table from the total number of the beneficiaries of 2,814 (NBS, 2020). Data was collected through qualitative and quantitative sources such as; publications, gazette, internet, questionnaires and interviews respectively. Therefore, 350 respondents formed the sample size which diversified interms sex, age, educational status etc. SPSS was employed to run the analysis Regression.

Hypothesis

H₀ Funding of N-Power programme has no significant effect on poverty reduction among the beneficiaries in Gombe State.

Model Analysis for Hypothesis One

Variable Coefficient

R 0.699

R-square 0.488

p-value 0.000

F stat 324.664

Df 341

Sum of squares

Regression 97.333

Residual 101.930

Source: SPSS output (Researcher's Survey, 2021)

From, the value of R = 0.699 shows that there is a strong (69.9%) relationship between funding of N-Power programme and poverty reduction. Also, R square = 0.488 indicates that 48.8% variability in poverty reduction is due to funding of N-Power programme in Gombe State. The low value of regression standard error (0.134) indicates the data for regression analysis are normal and balanced which validated the use of regression analysis. The p-value which is 0.000 (i.e., p < 0.05) indicates that the regression is significant, that there is useful linear model between the variables considered. This means the regression analysis is significant as shown in the above Coefficients of the Hypothesis.

Model Unstandardized

Coefficients

Standardized

Coefficients t Sig.

B Std. Error Beta

1 (Constant) 1.512 0.134 11.322 0.000

Funding of N-Power 0.613 0.034 0.699 18.018 0.000

a. Dependent Variable: poverty reduction

Source: SPSS output (Researcher's Survey, 2021)

Based on the p-value (i.e., p = 0.000) and standard coefficient value (0.613) respectively

indicates that the null hypothesis which states that “Funding of N-Power programme has no significant effect on poverty reduction among the beneficiaries in Gombe State” is rejected and there is a positive relationship (11.322) between funding of N-Power programme on poverty reduction among the beneficiaries in Gombe State.

Summary of Major Findings

In the course of this study which seeks to assess the implementation of N-Power Programme on poverty reduction among beneficiaries in Gombe State, the summary of the findings as delineated in this data analysis chapter is presented as below:

i. This study reveals that funding of N-Power programme has significant positive on poverty reduction among the beneficiaries in Gombe State.

Recommendations

N-Power funding pattern should be re-visited with a view to ensuring prompt payment of stipends to the beneficiaries to serve as a drastic effort to reduce poverty in the study state. It should be revisited by reassessing the current payment method in such a way that the payment should be made promptly. The Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs needs to uplift the treatment standard of N-Power beneficiaries in terms of payment as they do to their staff by making their stipend disbursement on a monthly static date so as to ensure the true attainment of poverty reduction via the programme.

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