



PERCEIVED EFFECT OF N-POWER SCHEME ON POVERTY REDUCTION AMONG GRADUATE YOUTHS IN KWARA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the effect of N-Power Scheme on poverty reduction in Kwara State. A Multi-stage sampling procedure was used to select two hundred and sixty-four (264) respondents across five (5) local government areas in Kwara State. Data were collected using structured questionnaire and analysed with descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentages and mean and Pearson product moment correlation. The mean age of the respondents was 28.5 years while 53% of them were males. The results revealed that N-power Teach (\bar{x} = 3.95), N-power Agro (\bar{x} = 3.72), N-power Build (\bar{x} = 3.34), N-power Health (\bar{x} = 3.31) and N-power Tech (\bar{x} = 3.23) were the major activities of the scheme that contributed to poverty reduction in the study area. The major challenges encountered by beneficiaries were Late payment of stipends (\bar{x} = 3.07), Insufficient information (\bar{x} = 2.91), Short lifespan of the programme (\bar{x} = 2.76), Political interference (\bar{x} = 2.73), and Website and internet hiccups (\bar{x} = 2.62). The study concluded that N-power scheme has contributed to poverty reduction in the study area. Reduced political interference will go a long way in ensuring the efficiency of the programme.

Keywords: Effect, Income, Graduate youths, N-Power scheme, Poverty reduction

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is bequeathed with rich human and natural resources. Given this wealth in economic potentials, it is ironical that Nigeria is still rated as one of the poorest countries of the world, placed at 152 position out of 188 countries on Human Development Index ranking. Nigeria is suffering not only from poverty, income inequality, low income, unstable growth, but also from unemployment, economic and political instability, and poor investment (Ogbeide, *Nwamaka and Agu*, 2015). In Nigeria, the scale of economic inequality has reached an extreme level, in spite of the numerous government poverty alleviation programmes initiated since 1980s.

Nigeria is lagging behind the 2015 SDG target No. 1 set by the United Nations General Assembly which is to “eradicate extreme poverty and hunger” by 2030 (Kolawole and Omobitan, 2015). With poverty level at 67.1 percent and the enormity of the challenge, it is not surprising that the 2015 target of 21.4 percent poverty level was not met by Nigeria (Faloye and Bakare, 2015). The concern over increasing poverty levels in Nigeria and the need for its eradication has led to the conceptualization and implementation of various targeted and non-targeted poverty alleviation programmes. Unfortunately, the issue of poverty alleviation has proven to be the most difficult challenge facing the country with a large majority of the populace living in extreme poverty (Faloye and Bakare, 2015).

According to Kolawole and Omobitan (2015), poverty in Nigeria is a paradox. Paradox in sense that, poverty level in Nigeria contradicts the

country's abundant wealth of both human and natural resources. That is, there is poverty in the midst of plenty and inequality in the face of economic growth. However, in the pursuit to better the standard of living of Nigerians, several programmes were introduced and implemented at different periods by different administrations such as: Operation Feed the Nation of 1977 (OFN), the Green Revolution of 1980, Directorate of foods, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFFRI), the National Directorate for Employment (NDE), Poverty Alleviation Programmes (PAP), the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), Agricultural Development Project (ADP) amongst many others. The major objective of these programmes amongst other things was to reduce and possibly eliminate poverty that has affected Nigeria's economy for decades and to reduce the inequality between the populace. In addition, effort has been committed by successive governments to bring about significant reduction in youth unemployment, subsequently leading to poverty reduction. One of such programmes is the N-power scheme initiated by the Buhari-led administration in 2016.

N-power is a National Social Investment Programme of the Federal Government aimed specifically at job creation and youth empowerment through human capital development. In essence, one of the objectives of the programme was to boost the human capital of the Nigerian labour force (N-Power Information Guide, 2017). The human capital boost appears to be in area of youth employment which was intended to be addressed through youth empowerment. Youth

empowerment was to be ensured through skill acquisition and development of youth in critical sectors such as education, health and agriculture. The core objective of the programme seems to hinge on skill acquisition and development of the Nigerian youth, both educated and non-educated, who had minimal hope of securing jobs, even at the minimum level needed to survive or raise a family (Okoro and Bassey, 2018; N-Power Information Guide 2017). In addition, the programme was designed to fill the unemployment gaps in the teaching profession in primary schools and to assist in taking basic education to children in remote areas, especially the marginalized communities. Furthermore, the programme was also created to provide manpower to primary health care centres in communities that appear to be under staffed while also providing manpower in the area of agricultural business (Okoro and Bassey, 2018).

Since the introduction of the N-power scheme by the Buhari-led administration in 2015, there is no independent empirical data to show the effect of the scheme in addressing youth unemployment and subsequently reducing poverty. More so, there have been serious claims on the part of government about the success of the scheme and media praises has rocked the airwaves, all without substantive investigative evidence backed by research. These claims cannot be substantiated without subjecting it to empirical research by assessing the extent of the programme. This study is therefore designed to bridge the knowledge gap by generating data that will support policy reforms and redirect the Federal Government on further programmes as well as improve the welfare of participants. It is against this background that this study was designed to specifically: examine the activities of N-power scheme towards poverty reduction, evaluate the influence of the scheme on beneficiaries' poverty reduction and the challenges encountered by the beneficiaries in the study area.

Hypothesis of the study was stated that there is no significant relationship between some selected socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents and poverty reduction of the beneficiaries.

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in Kwara State, Nigeria. Kwara State lies on latitudes $11^{\circ} 2'$ and $11^{\circ} 45'$ N, and longitude $20^{\circ} 45'$ and $60^{\circ} 4'$ E (NPC 2016). It covers a land area of about 32500km². It is bounded in the north by Niger state, in the south by Oyo, Osun and Ekiti states and in the east by Kogi state. It also has an international boundary in the west with the Republic of Benin. The state has a population of about 3,192,900 (NPC, 2016) and sixteen LGAs. The state N-Power has about 13,154 beneficiaries cutting across the various section of the scheme (N-Power Information Guide 2017). A

multi-stage sampling procedure was employed for the study. The first stage involved a random selection of five local government areas (Ilorin East, Offa, Irepodun, Baruten and Patigi) where N-power programme is in operation in Kwara State while the second stage also involved a random selection of four (4) communities from each of the five selected LGAs., making a total of twenty (20) communities. The third stage involves the use of systematic random sampling to select fifteen (15) beneficiaries from each of the selected communities. Thus, a total number of 300 beneficiaries were selected for the study. However, only Two hundred and Sixty-four (264) questionnaires representing 88% response rate was retrieved and used for the study. Primary data sources were used to obtain data from the respondents for the study. The primary data were gathered using structured questionnaire administered through personal interview. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and mean were used to analyse the socioeconomic characteristics of the beneficiaries. 3 and 5 points Likert-type scale was used to assess the constraints encountered by the beneficiaries, N-power activities and its influence on poverty reduction in the study area respectively. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to examine the relationship between the test variables and the generated hypothesis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socioeconomic characteristics

The socioeconomic characteristics of the sampled beneficiaries was presented in Table 1. The average age of the beneficiaries of N-power scheme was 29 years and about 34% of the respondents were between the ages of 28 and 32. The study revealed that males (53%) were more involved in N-power scheme than females (47 %) in the study area and this implies that more males participated in the programme than their female counterpart. This affirmed the assertion of Akujuru and Enyioko (2019) that gender, cultural and religious considerations militates against the participation of females in key activities of N-Power Programmes. Also, most of the respondents (69%) were single with only 31% being married. This implies that there were more single beneficiaries than married ones. Also, the mean age of the beneficiaries being 28 years could also be attributed to the majority being single. The result also agrees with the work of Akujuru and Enyioko (2019) who also asserted that beneficiaries are not sufficiently empowered to face marital responsibilities.

Most (64%) of the respondents had household size between 1 and 3 persons. This is not surprising considering the fact that majority of the beneficiaries were graduate youths who may be



newly married and are still in their productive stage hence, the reason for the few number of persons in the household. Also, table 1 revealed that (38%) of the respondents have an annual income of between ₦200,000.00 and ₦299,000.00. This shows that the respondents have an average monthly and daily

income of between ₦16,667.00 - ₦24,917.00 and ₦555.00 - ₦830.00 respectively. This amount is less than the United Nations recommendation of ₦1,350.00 on feeding per day (World Bank Group, 2015). This therefore means that most of the respondents live below the poverty line.

Table 1: Socioeconomic characteristics of respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	141	53.0
Female	123	47.0
Age		
18 – 22	33	13.0
23 – 27	88	33.0
28 – 32	90	34.0
33 – 37	53	20.0
Marital Status		
Single	181	69.0
Married	83	31.0
Divorced	0	0.0
Widowed	0	0.0
Household Size		
1 – 3	169	64.0
4 – 6	85	32.0
7 – 9	10	4.0
10 and above	0	0.0
Annual Income (₦)		
Below 100,000.00	51	19.0
100,000.00 – 199,000.00	63	24.0
200,000.00 – 299,000.00	101	38.0
Above 300,000.00	49	19.0

Field Survey, 2019

Activities of N-power Scheme towards poverty reduction

The result in Table 2 showed the major activities of N-power scheme towards poverty reduction in the order of agreement as indicated by the information received. A large proportion of the respondents strongly agreed that activities such as 'N-power Teach (43.0%)', 'N-power Agro (35.0%)', 'N-power Build (21.0%)', 'N-power Health (31.0%)', and 'N-power Tech (21.0%)' were the major activities of the scheme that contributed to poverty reduction in the study area.

Table 2 further showed that 'N-power Creative (10.0%)', and 'N-power Tax (8.0%)' were N-power activities that did not significantly contribute to poverty reduction in the study area. The result revealed that the beneficiaries have benefitted maximally from the programme and had their living standard improved. The result in table 2 is therefore a pointer to the fact that each of the activities of N-power scheme has helped to reduce the level of poverty in the study area though at different levels. The programme therefore should be improved upon as it has the potential of bringing more youths in the study area out of poverty.

Table 2: Activities of N-power scheme towards poverty reduction

Activities of N-power Scheme	Strongly Agree		Agree		Undecided		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
N-power Tax	22	8.0	32	12.0	56	21.0	99	38.0	55	21.0
N-power Build	66	25.0	82	31.0	29	11.0	50	19.0	37	14.0
N-power Health	83	31.0	67	25.0	15	6.0	48	18.0	51	19.0
N-power Teach	114	43.0	92	35.0	9	3.0	29	11.0	29	11.0
N-power Tech	56	21.0	67	25.0	33	12.0	97	37.0	11	4.0
N-power Agro	93	35.0	86	33.0	32	12.0	23	9.0	30	11.0
N-power Creative	27	10.0	77	29.0	45	17.0	70	27.0	45	17.0

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Perceived Effect of N-power scheme on poverty reduction

Table 3 showed the perceived effect of N-power scheme on poverty reduction among beneficiaries in the study area. Majority of the respondents strongly agreed that the major effects of N-power on poverty reduction as perceived by them were “skill development (53.0%)”, “increased income (53.0%)”, “employment generation (50.0%)”, “increase food availability (49.0%)” and “increased social interaction (43.0%)”. The implication of the result is that the beneficiaries agreed that they have benefitted maximally from the different activities of the scheme and that the

scheme has helped to bring about a significant reduction in their poverty levels. The result is consistent with the findings of Akujuru and Enyioko (2019) who stated that there exists a positive significant relationship between the scheme and the beneficiaries’ economic well-being. In other words, the scheme has led to positive changes in standard of living of beneficiaries of the programme. Furthermore, Aderonmu (2017) pointed out that many government programmes designed to alleviate poverty has helped to reduce poverty but pointed out policy summersault as the causes of failure of such developmental programmes.

Table 3: Perceived Effect of N-power Scheme on poverty reduction of beneficiaries.

Perceived Effect of Programme	Strongly Agree		Agree		Undecided		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Increase income	141	53.0	101	38.0	10	4.0	12	5.0	-	-
Increase social interaction	112	43.0	99	37.0	-	-	40	15.0	12	5.0
Increase food availability	129	49.0	92	35.0	26	10.0	10	4.0	7	3.0
Increase conflict	28	11.0	39	15.0	19	7.0	99	37.0	79	30.0
Skill development	139	53.0	99	37.0	20	8.0	11	4.0	-	-
Improve savings	80	30.0	92	35.0	28	11.0	34	13.0	30	12.0
Employment generation	131	50.0	99	37.0	20	8.0	11	4.0	-	-
Improve access to medical facilities	53	20.0	68	26.0	39	15.0	44	17.0	60	23.0
Increase of own productive asset	60	23.0	53	20.0	40	15.0	57	22.0	54	20.0

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Challenges encountered by beneficiaries of N-power scheme

Table 4 showed the challenges the beneficiaries encounter in their participation in N-power scheme. The major challenges faced by respondents in participating in N-Power scheme include late payment of stipends ($\bar{x} = 3.07$), insufficient information ($\bar{x} = 2.91$), short lifespan of the programme ($\bar{x} = 2.76$), political interference ($\bar{x} = 2.73$) and website and internet hiccups ($\bar{x} = 2.62$). Sometimes, beneficiaries do not get to receive their stipend until after three months. During this time, beneficiaries are not encouraged to go to their place of posting or discharge their duties effectively and efficiently. This thus pose a serious challenge to the smooth running of the scheme. Also, the programme has a life span of two years and so, after the first year, beneficiaries tend to be lackadaisical in their attitude to work as they begin to look elsewhere for a more permanent job offer. The result is similar to the findings of Akujuru and Enyioko (2019) who reported non-payment of stipends to participants as at when due, high transportation paid by beneficiaries to work, insufficient information, wrong bank verification number and overbearing hands of politicians in the programme as major problems affecting N-power scheme in alleviating poverty in Rivers State, Nigeria. In similar vein, Ike and Uzokwe (2011)

asserted nonchalant attitude of government officers, inconsistency in government policies and untimely release of funds as the major constraints militating against participation in government developmental programmes in Nigeria.

Test of hypothesis

Table 5 revealed that the correlation coefficient is 0.384. This signifies that there is a positive and significant relationship between respondent’s age and the effect of N-power scheme on poverty reduction in the study area ($p=0.0001$, p -value 0.005). This is expected considering the fact that majority of the beneficiaries of the scheme are young and unmarried and so, had lesser responsibilities when compared to those who are married and advanced in age. Furthermore, table 5 showed that there is a positive and significant relationship between the respondents’ Gender and the effect of the scheme on poverty reduction among beneficiaries ($p=0.001$, $r=0.381$). Similar result was obtained for household size ($p = 0.001$, $r = 0.348$) thus the null hypothesis is rejected. The smaller the household size, the lesser the responsibilities beneficiaries have to cater for hence, the effect of the scheme. The result is consistent with Akujuru and Enyioko (2019) who also pointed out that a positive relationship existed between N-power activities and poverty reduction in Rivers State, Nigeria.

**Table 4: Challenges encountered by beneficiaries of N-power Scheme**

Challenges	Very Severe	Severe	Less Severe	Not Severe	Score Point	Mean
Non-payment of some beneficiaries	51	60	100	53	636	2.41
Wrong bank verification number	61	38	98	67	620	2.35
Insufficient information	88	121	19	36	768	2.91
Being posted to long distance	29	49	100	86	549	2.08
Inability to do inter-state transfer	59	64	80	61	649	2.46
Short life span of the programme	81	93	36	54	729	2.76
Late payment of stipends	110	102	13	39	810	3.07
Website and internet hiccups	67	64	99	34	692	2.62
Political interference	94	68	39	63	721	2.73

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Table 5: The relationship between selected socioeconomic characteristics of respondents and the effect of the scheme on reducing poverty level of beneficiaries'

Variable	N	X	SD	R	P	Decision
Age	264	1.18	0.39	0.384	0.001	Rejected
Gender	264	1.71	0.49	0.348	0.001	Rejected
Household size	264	1.99	0.78	0.306	0.022	Rejected

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed),

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that N-power scheme has contributed to poverty reduction hence improved livelihood condition in the area. The scheme has helped in skill development, increased beneficiaries' income, employment generation, increased food availability amongst many others. Notable among the challenges encountered by the beneficiaries are: late payment of stipends; insufficient information; short life span of the scheme; political interference as well as website and internet hiccups. In lieu of these, the following recommendations were made:

- i. Considering the short life span of the scheme, government should look at the possibility of engaging and absorbing outstanding beneficiaries into the civil service either at state or federal level. This will encourage hard work and enhance effective participation in the scheme.
- ii. Effort should be made by the Federal government to reduce political interference in the scheme. This will go a long way in ensuring that the right set of people benefits from the scheme.
- iii. It is pertinent for government to promote rural development through N-Power programmes. This is because rural development is seen as the key for poverty alleviation of the rural dwellers that constitute the large portion of the nation's population.

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