

Impact of N-Power Programme on Youth Empowerment in Gombe State

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Abstract

Empowering young people means creating and supporting the enabling conditions under which young people act on their own rather than rely on others. The study examined the impact of Nigeria's N-Power program on youth empowerment in Gombe state from 2016 to 2024. The population of 5,507 was drawn from the 2016 beneficiaries of N-Power (Teach) from Kaltungo, Akko and Gombe local government areas of Gombe state. To achieve the research objective, a sample size of 372 was drawn using Taro Yamane's (1964) formula. The cluster sampling technique was adopted, whereby one local government was selected from each of the senatorial districts of the state. Respondents from each local government were drawn using a simple random sampling technique. Both qualitative and quantitative methods of data analysis were employed. The study revealed that there was an increase in the monthly income, access to basic needs of shelter, as well as access to healthcare facilities by N-power beneficiaries and that some beneficiaries have utilised the programme to acquire entrepreneurial skills, which grants them financial freedom. Therefore, it is recommended that, government should provide interest free loans to interested volunteers to start up their small or medium scale enterprises; the federal government should ramp up pressures on state governments to absorb some of the volunteers in their civil service, effect an upward review of monthly stipend to beneficiaries; and the programme should be extended beyond the current two-years period to eight years.

Keywords: N-power, Youth, Employment, Empowerment.

1.1 Introduction

Youth are regarded as the future leaders of society, playing a crucial role in shaping development prospects. Therefore, their inclusion in national development plans and initiatives is essential. The World Bank's characterisation of Nigeria as an abundant paradox, in its 2018 report, remains in contrast with the official statistics within government spheres. This paradox arises from the challenge of comprehending how a resource-rich nation facing significant issues such as high inflation, unemployment, and poverty can be considered to be making progress, even if its economic growth is at double-digit levels. Nigeria is making little progress in eliminating poverty.

Despite abundant human, agricultural, petroleum, natural gas, and vast untapped solid mineral resources, Nigeria has failed to achieve significant progress in national socio-economic development. Instead, the country has regressed to become one of the 25 poorest nations on the

culsp of the twenty-first century, despite ranking among the wealthiest fifty countries in the early 1970s. Poverty and unemployment are evils bedevilling Nigeria's path to growth and development. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) report indicates how the "population of Nigerians in poverty has consistently increased from 17.7 million in 1988 to 66.7 million in 2004". In 2010, the NBS reported that 60.9% of Nigerians were living in poverty (Obadan, 2017).

Poverty and unemployment rates continue to climb vertically, translating into social problems of more monumental and complicated proportions, attempting to defy successive government intervention programmes geared towards ameliorating them. Successive governments engage in different youth empowerment programmes to improve the quality of life of the Nigerian youth.

President Olusegun Aremu Obasanjo (1999-2007) initiated the National Poverty Eradication Program (NAPEP) to alleviate poverty. According to Aderonmu (2017), NAPEP was established in 2010 as the primary agency of the federal government to eradicate extreme hunger and poverty in Nigeria. The Administration of President Muhammadu Buhari designed and implemented the current National Social Investment Programme (N-SIP) as a strategy for combating poverty and unemployment. The N-SIP scheme was created to reduce the twin evils of poverty and unemployment through capacity building, investment and direct financial support (Abin, 2018). The programme consists of four major components, including the Job Creation and Youth Empowerment (N-Power), National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP), National Cash Transfer Programme (NCTP) and Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP). N-Power is geared towards graduate job creation, poverty alleviation and empowerment initiatives through volunteering services. The Programme is available for graduates and non-graduates. The programme is aimed at inculcating in Nigerian youths the learning-work entrepreneurship culture between the ages of 18-35 (FGN 2018). According to Kabeer (2018), the goals of the programme include reducing the rate of unemployment in the country, facilitating the transfer of entrepreneurial, technical skills and employability ability and bringing solutions to active public service and government diversification policy.

The graduate's category is further divided into three areas, namely, the N-Teach, N-Health and N-Agro. For the non-graduates' category, the N-Build Scheme is geared towards equipping its beneficiaries with the necessary and meaningful skills to be self-employed. Therefore, the paper seeks to examine the impact of the N-power programme on youth empowerment in Gombe State by appraising employment opportunities, income distribution, access to basic needs of shelter and healthcare facilities in Gombe State.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Unemployment poses a significant challenge to the Nigerian population, with young people being disproportionately affected. It stands out as one of the most pressing social issues in Nigeria today. Data from the National Bureau of Statistics (2010) indicate that more than half of the Nigerian population currently resides in impoverished conditions, presenting a persistent and concerning phenomenon that requires immediate national attention (Obadan, 2017). This issue is closely linked to the persistent and unrelenting poverty rate in the society, creating fertile ground for various social ills like armed robbery and burglary (Olajide & Diah, 2017). The reports suggest that the rising poverty rates in Nigeria contribute to the country's insecurity. To address this challenge, successive Nigerian governments have instituted a variety of measures, such as NAPEP, SURE-P, and presently, the NSIP initiative. The NSIP initiative was conceived to address a range of social problems such as poverty, teeming youth unemployment, entrepreneurship orientation

and illiteracy (Akujuru & Enyioko, 2019). The N-power initiative, which is the job creation component of the policy, aims at reducing poverty and unemployment and is targeted at Nigerian youths. However, creating a policy and its implementation to achieve set goals appear mutually exclusive in the Nigerian context.

Efforts by successive governments to combat excruciating poverty and monumental unemployment, as well as other initiatives geared toward alleviating the precarious situation surrounding the Nigerian youths and enhancing the quality of life, had ended in a fiasco as a result of the abysmal and porous implementation of said programmes. The participation of the scheme cut across youths in all the 36 states of the federation and the FCT. One of such is Gombe State, where 74.6% of residents are living below the poverty line (UNICEF), which suggests that seven out of 10 Gombe State residents are poor. According to the World Bank, persons regarded to be extremely poor live below the poverty line of \$1 per day. The question is, has the scheme been able to empower the unemployed youth?

Hence, this research seeks to provide answers to the following questions:

- i. To what extent has the N-power (teach) scheme improved the level of the income distribution of beneficiaries in selected local government areas of Gombe State?
- ii. To what extent has the N-power (teach) scheme improved the level of access to the basic need of shelter of beneficiaries in selected local government areas of Gombe State?
- iii. To what extent has the N-power (teach) scheme improved access to healthcare facilities to the beneficiaries in selected local government areas of Gombe State?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this paper is to examine the impact of the N-Power (teach) programme on youth empowerment in Gombe State. However, the specific objectives are:

- i. To ascertain the impact of the N-Power (teach) scheme on the level of the income distribution of beneficiaries in selected local government areas of Gombe State.
- ii. To examine the impact of the N-Power (teach) scheme on the level of access to basic needs of the shelter of beneficiaries in selected local government areas of Gombe State.
- iii. To assess the impact of the N-power (teach) scheme on access to healthcare services for the beneficiaries in selected local government areas of Gombe State.

2.1.2.1 Youth Empowerment in Nigeria

According to the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment (PAYE) 2006 – 2015, developed through wide consultation with key stakeholders in all regions of the Commonwealth, youth empowerment is to empower, engage and create value so that young women and men can contribute to the economic, social and cultural advancement of their families and countries and their fulfillment. Enyioko (2006) also identified the following dimensions of youth empowerment: young people are empowered when they acknowledge that they have or can create choices in life, are aware of the implications of those choices, make an informed decision freely, take action based on that decision and accept responsibility for the consequences of these actions. Empowering young people means creating and supporting the enabling conditions under which young people can act on their own behalf, and their own terms, rather than at the direction of others. Youth empowerment, therefore, can also be seen as a means of exposing the youth to skills or training that make them productive. It encompasses different ways youths can be exposed to different trades that may help them to engage in sustainable paid and self-employment (Idoko, 2014).

Omotere (2011) refers to youth empowerment as a process whereby young people gain the ability and authority to make decisions and implement change in their own lives. In this case, therefore, youth empowerment involves different ways through which the youths can be empowered to achieve self-sustained national development, instead of depending on the government for the provision of employment opportunities. In general terms, youth empowerment is referred to as a process of skill acquisition or development, to enhance the social, economic and cultural advancement of youths and their families. Such a process is always targeted at developing the individual's capabilities in order to make him/her more productive, more useful, self-reliant and employable. From the foregoing, youth empowerment can be seen as a process whereby young people are encouraged to take charge of their lives. According to Aderonmu (2017), the enabling conditions are as follows:

- i. An economic and social base
- ii. Political will, adequate resource allocation and supportive legal and administrative frameworks
- iii. A stable environment of equality, peace and democracy and access to knowledge, information and skills and a positive value system.

N-Power and Youth Empowerment

N-Power Programme is a job creation and empowerment initiative of the Social Investment Programme, designed to reduce youth unemployment and poverty in the country. The system of social investment programmes was structured for entrepreneurial skills development, thereby facilitating the development of skills and initiatives to increase the employability of graduates, among other categories of unemployed youths (Adoba, 2005). Social Investment programmes have impacted and empowered most of the youth through the introduction of entrepreneurial skills and initiatives. This is with the intent of solving perennial problems of economic growth and development in Nigeria and engaging Nigerian youths in all facets of socio-economic life.

Social investment programs play complementary roles in socio-economic and infrastructural development. The objectives of the N-Power programme include improving the living conditions of the youths, providing employment, and supporting the development of human capital. As a tool to facilitate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goal of poverty eradication, the N-Power program has promoted human capital development, given the fact that poverty is an important inhibitor of such development. The stipend has been helping to address the problems of the beneficiaries in Nigeria, with over 500,000 of them so far (Onehi, 2017).

As a human capital development driver, the N-power programme has served as a means of reducing youth unemployment and enhancing their livelihood (Okoli et al., 2014). The programme equally addresses the human capital challenge in Nigeria by helping beneficiaries send their children and even siblings to school. Some beneficiaries have gotten married, and some have embarked on further studies with the aid of this programme. Several testimonies have highlighted the positive impact of the N-Power programme on the beneficiaries (Stamping et al., 2018). As most beneficiaries are receiving stipends, it changes their orientation towards life, with the potential to reduce crime and dependency syndrome among youths.

Theoretical Framework

Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory emerged in the mid-20th century as economists sought to understand the role of education and training in driving economic growth and individual prosperity (Schultz, 1961). The term "human capital" was coined by economist Theodore Schultz, who argued that

investments in education, training, and health were analogous to investments in physical capital such as machinery and infrastructure (Schultz, 1960). Building on earlier works by economists like Gary Becker and Jacob Mincer (Becker, 1964; Mincer, 1958), Human Capital Theory gained prominence as a framework for analysing the relationship between human capital accumulation and economic development. Human Capital Theory has made significant contributions to our understanding of the relationship between education, skills, and economic outcomes. It highlights the importance of investing in education and skills development as drivers of economic growth and productivity (Becker, 1964). By enhancing the knowledge, skills, and abilities of individuals, societies can improve labour productivity, innovation, and overall economic performance (Schultz, 1961). Furthermore, Human Capital Theory emphasises the link between education and training and individuals' labour market outcomes, such as employment rates, wages, and career advancement (Mincer, 1958). Higher levels of human capital are associated with better job opportunities, higher earnings, and greater job security (Becker, 1964).

Human Capital Theory operates on several key assumptions. First, it assumes that individuals make rational decisions about investing in education and training based on a cost-benefit analysis (Becker, 1964). This implies that individuals weigh the expected returns from education against the costs, such as tuition fees, foregone earnings, and time spent studying. Secondly, the theory assumes that labour markets are efficient and that individuals' skills and qualifications are accurately reflected in their wages (Mincer, 1958). In other words, there is a direct relationship between human capital accumulation and economic rewards in the form of higher wages and better job opportunities.

Despite its contributions, Human Capital Theory has faced criticism on several fronts. One common criticism is its overemphasis on individual responsibility for skill acquisition, neglecting structural factors such as socio-economic background, discrimination, and unequal access to education and training opportunities (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Critics argue that Human Capital Theory fails to account for the role of social and cultural factors in shaping individuals' opportunities for human capital accumulation (Bourdieu, 1986).

Human Capital Theory is highly relevant to the study of N-Power's impact on youth empowerment. By investing in skills training, job placements, and entrepreneurship opportunities, N-Power seeks to enhance the human capital of young participants, thereby improving their employability and socio-economic outcomes. The theory's emphasis on education, training, and labour market outcomes provides a useful framework for understanding how N-Power interventions contribute to youth empowerment and economic development. However, it is essential to critically examine the assumptions and limitations of Human Capital Theory, considering the broader socio-economic context and structural barriers that may affect the effectiveness of youth empowerment programs like N-Power. By integrating insights from Human Capital Theory with other theoretical perspectives, researchers can gain a comprehensive understanding.

3.1 Methodology

The paper adopted a descriptive research design. The population of this study was derived from the 2016 beneficiaries of the N-Power Teach programme in Gombe State. A total of 5,507 beneficiaries were selected from the Kaltungo, Akko, and Gombe Local governments of Gombe State. The sample of 372 respondents was derived from Taro Yamani's formula for determining the sample size. There are eleven (11) local governments in Gombe State. These are Akko, Balanga, Billiri, Dukku, Kaltungo, Kwami, Shongom, Funakaye, Gombe, Nafada and Yamaltu

Deba. Therefore, a stratified random sampling technique was adopted where the eleven (11) local governments were grouped into three (3) to represent three (3) senatorial zones of the state. The three (3) senatorial zones are Gombe North (Gombe, Kwami, Dukku, Funakaye, and Nafada local government), Gombe South (Billiri, Balanga, Kaltungo and Shongom local government), and Gombe Central (Akko and Yamaltu Deba local government). The simple random sampling technique, through balloting, was used to select one local government from each of the senatorial zones. In Gombe North, Gombe local government was selected, from Gombe South, Kaltungo local government was selected, while Akko local government was selected in Gombe Central. Thus, the purposive sampling technique was adopted to select the respondents who directly benefited from the programme. This category of respondents can give satisfactory information to address the issue under study.

Table 1: Population Categorisation

Senatorial district	Local government	Population
Gombe North	Gombe	3774
Gombe South	Kaltungo	525
Gombe Central	Akko	1208
TOTAL		5507

Source: N-power Beneficiaries list, 2024

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 2: Responses on whether they had any source of income before the N-Power programme was introduced

Options	Responses Across Local Government Areas			Total	Percentages%
	Kaltungo	Gombe	Akko		
Yes	15	99	3	117	32%
No	18	155	78	251	68%
Total	33	254	81	368	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 2 shows the responses across the Local Governments who were asked whether they had been engaged in any work before the N-Power programme was introduced. 117, representing 32%, agreed to it while 251, representing 68%, disagreed with having any source of income before the N-Power programme. This shows that the majority of the respondents did not have any source of income before N-Power.

Table 3: Responses on their nature of accommodation before the N-power programme

Options	Responses Across Local Gov't Areas			Total	Percentage
	Kaltungo	Gombe	Akko		
Family House	15	138	38	191	51%
Squatting	8	23	6	37	10%
Rented Apartment	9	75	35	119	32%
Owned	1	18	2	21	7%
Total	33	254	81		100%

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 3 indicates the nature of accommodation conditions of N-power beneficiaries before the N-power programme. 191 respondents, representing 51%, said they were in their family houses, 37 respondents, representing 10%, said they were squatting, 119 respondents, representing 32% of the total respondents, said they rented apartments, while 21 respondents, representing 7%, said they lived in their personal accommodation. This shows that the majority of respondents lived in their family houses before the N-power programme.

To what extent has the N-power scheme improved access to healthcare facilities for the beneficiaries in the selected local government of the State?

Table 4: Responses on access to healthcare facilities before the N-power programme

Options	Responses Across Local Gov't Areas			Total	Percentage
	Kaltungo	Gombe	Akko		
Self-Medication	18	87	30	135	37%
Traditional/Herbalist	2	13	7	22	6%
Private Clinic/Hospital	3	3	0	6	1%
Government clinic/hospital	10	151	44	208	56%
Total	33	254	81	368	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2024

In Table 4, respondents' opinions on access to health care facilities before N-power indicate that 135 respondents, representing 37%, engaged in self-medication, 22 respondents, representing 6%, said they patronized traditional/herbalists, 6 respondents representing 1%, had access to private clinics/Hospitals, while 208 of the respondents, representing 56%, had access to government clinics/hospitals. This means the majority of the respondents (56% and 37% respectively) visited government clinics/hospitals and relied on self-medication before the N-power programme.

Findings

- The study revealed that N-power has improved the working conditions among youths within the study area.
- It was revealed that beneficiaries were pleased with their monthly stipends despite not being paid as of when due. The study shows that beneficiaries were earning between ₦5,000-10,000 monthly before the introduction of the scheme. This could be attributed to why they were pleased with their monthly income from the scheme.

Conclusion

The developed and developing nations alike see their Youths as the leaders of tomorrow. This could not be farfetched from the position that they play a crucial role in the prospect for development and are expected to be included in all national development plans and programmes. As a result of the foregoing, governments at all levels are expected to bring out the potential of the youths, by empowering them to reduce poverty and unemployment in the country. The study determined the extent to which the implementation of the N-power programme by former President Mohammadu Buhari generated employment opportunities for the teeming youths. There was an affirmation from beneficiaries regarding the impact of the programme as it introduced them to entrepreneurship ventures such as tailoring, and catering, among others.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations were outlined:

1. More social investment programmes should be introduced in addition to N-power. Also, government should provide interest free loans to interested volunteers to start up their small or medium scale enterprises. By so doing the youths will be self-reliant and by implication, reduce the rising cases of social vices in Nigeria.
2. There should be an upward review of the monthly stipends to beneficiaries. This will improve the level of income distribution of beneficiaries, thereby having a trickle-down effect on their families and friends
3. The N-power programme should be extended beyond its current period of two years, to eight years. With this, beneficiaries can have access to the basic needs of shelter. Herein, the majority of the respondents can move out of rented apartments to their houses.
4. The federal government should mount pressures on state governments to absorb some of the volunteers in their civil service. Also, there should be a health insurance scheme to the beneficiaries in order to improve access to healthcare facilities for the Nigerian youths.

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