

N-Power Programme and Poverty Reduction in Nigeria. Akwa Ibom State Perspective

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Abstract

Unemployment has always been an important challenge in the way of societal development in Nigeria, with crime and social disturbances being some of its consequences. Growing concerns over unemployment in Akwa Ibom State were reported by the World Bank and the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics. To stem youth unemployment and foster economic empowerment, the Federal Government of Nigeria initiated a social investment program called N-Power in 2015. Our study considers the impact of the N-Power program, focusing on N-Health, N-Agro, and N-Tech under Akwa Ibom State. Using descriptive research and survey research designs, they collected data from secondary sources like textbooks, journals, and government bulletins. The analysis revealed that although the N-Power program aimed to impart job-ready skills to youth, problems such as inadequate coordination, politicization, and resource misallocation increasingly diminished the programs' effectiveness towards youth employment. Hypothesis testing results showed that there was no significant relationship between skill development in health through the N-Health program and job creation in agriculture through the N-Agro program. Likewise, N-Tech was considered to be irrelevant to the local labor market. Common challenges faced across all programs were

obsolete curricula, poor hands-on training, inadequate funding, and poor partnership with industries. Therefore, it was concluded that improved program design, adequate resource allocation, and cross-sector collaboration are pivotal in rectifying these problems that stand in the way of strengthening N-Power's ability to deliver on its promises of employment and empowerment. Also, the study recommended an urgent need for curriculum update in line with current agro-industries; enhancement of infrastructure; and improvement of partnership with related sectors towards long-term viability and performance of the programme within Nigeria and Akwa Ibom State, in particular.

Keywords: N-power, Poverty, poverty Reduction, employment generation

Introduction

Unemployment has become an important anti-social issue, a very crucial social issue that confronts most nations because it greatly influences socio-economic development in the country. Hence job creation has become the paramount concern of various governments, for it has a strong correlation with the wellbeing of their citizens. Beyond generating economic inefficiencies, unemployment prevents countries from developing, maximizing, and utilizing their human resources, especially in rural areas. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2023), Nigeria at a 38% unemployment rate stands on a record high. Mostly youth, who are above half of Nigeria's population, still suffer unemployment that they could really help the economic advancement of the country (Koro & Bassey, 2018). This very high rate of unemployment has led to social and economic instability in the country with most youth engaging in criminal activities such as armed robbery, cultism, prostitution, and kidnapping, as means of survival (Ajufo, 2013).

The niggling unemployment condition has inspired several Nigerian administrations into launching a wide variety of social investments and programmes designed on the twin potencies of poverty alleviation and wealth creation: Directorate of Foods, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFFRI), since 1986; Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) in 1976; Green Revolution of 1980; National Directorate of Employment (NDE) since 1986; National Poverty Eradication Programme of 2001; National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (NEEDS) of 2003; Subsidy Reinvestment Programme of 2012; Presidential Youth Empowerment Scheme of 2021; and N-Power, to name a few (Abin, 2018). All of these were brought in to reduce poverty and curb increasing unemployment in Nigeria; however, the usefulness of such programmes is still being debated to-date. They at times were able to provide some sort of economic scaffolding but often times, they never could.

Being different from other youth empowerment projects, the N-Power programme, initiated by the Nigerian government in 2015, had its inception in 2016. Its primary objective was to provide relief to the Nigerian youth in terms of unemployment and poverty by providing job opportunities, human capital development and skills acquisition: (N-Power Information Guide; 2017). The programme further aims to resolve teacher shortages in rural areas and workforce shortages in healthcare and agriculture; it, therefore, contributes to the

development of Nigerian human capital (Okoro & Bassey, 2018). For these achievements, the N-Power programmes are divided into various sectors: N-Agric, N-Teach, N-Health, N-Tax, N-Build, N-Software and N-Creative; they particularly target both graduates and non-graduates. The overall thrust of the programme is to empower Nigerian youths to enable them to realize their potential in critical sectors like agriculture, health and education.

The perceived failure of the service delivery programme to mitigate unemployment has been the subject of debates with respect to N-Power (especially in Akwa Ibom State). The lack of coordination, monitoring and evaluation is one of the issues that affect the success of the programme. This politicization of the programme in that local politicians have exercised control over its operations has led to favouritism and diversion of resources away from the intended beneficiaries to other purposes. Aggravating this scenario is the conflicting operations of federal, state and local government agencies that lack coordination, which in turn translates into duplicated efforts and conflicts detrimental to the programme. On the contrary, citizens' negative attitude towards government empowerment initiatives and non-utilisation of funding have further frustrated the objectives of the programme. On this note, the research will therefore endeavour to determine the impact of N-Power on unemployment reduction and wealth creation among youths in Akwa Ibom State. The study's primary objective is to examine the relationship between the N-Power programme and employment generation in Akwa Ibom State, with particular reference to how N-Agro and N-Tech have enhanced employment opportunities in the state.

Conceptual Review

Social Policy

Social policy such of **N-Power** connects with the set of policies adopted by governments to see to welfare and social protection, yet it also denotes the ways of developing welfare for a society. In principle, social policy mainly concerns itself with social services and the welfare state; however, in another perspective, it involves a great many issues outside the scope of the actions of government. -For example, with the evolution of welfare, consideration is given to how welfare is advocated for and the socio-economic context within which its evolution occurs (Roseline & Charlse, 2020). Certainly, interrelated are these components; however, social policy implications stretch far beyond mere legislation.

Social policy can be perceived in no fewer than three meanings. It is first perceived as an output (namely, a policy or a set of policies), their execution, and the social impact generated thereby. The second definition treats social policy as a discipline-a field of inquiry. Third, social policy is perceived as a process for the attainment of social welfare. In this regard, Bisong (2019) sees social policy as a plan or strategy set by any governmental or institutional organization meant to advance or change society in a certain form. Omoniyi (2016) views it as any government initiative that seeks to meet a pressing social need (for example, employment, education, health, and housing). These policies are designed on purpose to improve human welfare: education, health, employment, crime prevention, and poverty alleviation. Marshall, Ibrahim, and Fatim (2019) describe the social policy as those policies through which a state seeks to secure the welfare of the citizenry. According to Erskine (1998), social policies concern

public policies that relate to market operations, private consumption, and interpersonal relations that either advance or frustrate the well-being of individuals or groups.

This is to say that social policy operates within sophisticated social, political and institutional contexts that produce welfare, distribute it, and consume it. Social policy paradigm intends to identify the normative framework upon which processes lead to welfare or work against it, which encompasses moral and political debates as to what should be the subject of intent. According to Aderonmu (2017), social policy is concerned with the welfare of the individual citizen as well as that of the society as a whole. It is a system for the allocation of welfare or well-being among groups of people against basic life-oriented assumptions such as health, education, income and employment. Such importance is underscored by the fact that both individual and social well-being are inextricably tied to the quality of relationships within society. There is no doubt that these relations are a lot hard to map and make sense of, but still, it is very much important for the theorists and practitioners to understand these dynamics to enable them to formulate proper policies.

N-Power Programme

The N-Power Programme was founded with the goal of helping curb unemployment and skill development of Nigerians, mainly the youth, both those educated and uneducated. This initiative furnishes young people with educational opportunities, training and stipends at N30,000 monthly. Thus, the programme should seek to eliminate poverty and malnutrition, self-reliance, and consumption-based development (Bennel, 2018). As it stands today, the N-Power initiative admits Nigerians between ages 18 and 35. Skill building platform access is granted to all participants listed under the programme, so long as the candidates fulfil the eligibility requirements of the various programmes. Candidates shall be selected on the basis of:

- (a) the ability to develop the necessary skills;
- (b) having genuine interest in the field of their choice;
- (c) willingness to undertake relevant assessments; and
- (d) willingness to emerge from their comfort zones.

The Tech started offering its services in seven main categories--N-Power Agro, N-Power Tax, N-Power Build, N-Power Creative, N-Power Health, N-Power Teach and N-Power Tech (Hardware & Software) (Obadan, 2017). However, for certain individuals, this means of skill cultivation does not really go far, as the results of such programmes largely depend on whichever level of engagement is set on by the participants, as well as the socio-economic setting in which they are implemented.

The Corps N-Power Volunteers calls Nigerians aged 18 to 35, especially those who have gotten some post-tertiary education, to join in a two-year paid voluntary work. The volunteers are engaged in local service activities, but each volunteer is given a computer on which there are basic work information and resources for continuing education and training. After 200,000 N-Power Volunteers were taken into service by the federal government in 2016, another 300,000 followed the year after. By June 2017, the Graduate Category alone had come into application,

but N-Power volunteers contribute through mentoring, education and instruction in four major areas (Bennel, 2018). Although this programme has provided some relief at the moment to the beneficiaries, it remains to be seen whether it will have as far-reaching an implication as anticipated.

One other objective (aim) of the N-Power platform was to support the diversification of the Nigerian economy. By giving Nigerian youths the caliber of training and credentials needed in the information economy, N-Power enables them to become innovators in both local and international markets. The scheme creates jobs in areas such as software development, hardware servicing, animation, graphic design, building services, and craft. According to the Federal Ministry of Youth Development (2017), emphasis in N-Power is placed on imparting non-graduates with practical, commercial, and technical skills to better employability and enhance the quality of their lives (Obadan, 2017). Nevertheless, statistics show that 500,000 laptop computers, containing relevant information to facilitate participation and continual progress, would be given to graduates participating in the N-Power Corps scheme. This initiative targets four major sectors: agriculture, health, power technology, and community education. Being multifaceted in nature, the approach is essential as it accounts for the broad spectrum of demands a fast-growing economy has.

Objectives of N-Power Programme

The objectives of N-Power programs include:

- i. The immediate intervention aimed at raising the level of life for a huge chunk of unemployed youth in Nigeria.
- ii. To pave the way for imparting technical, entrepreneurial, and employment skills through an advanced mechanism.
- iii. Working towards setting up infrastructure for restoring broken public services and strategies for diversifying government.
- iv. The expansion and consolidation of Nigeria's knowledge economy.

Broad Categorization of the N-Power Program

i. N-Power Health

It concentrates on children, pregnant women, and other vulnerable members of society. The volunteers are further required to lobby for preventive healthcare in their communities among these target groups.

ii. N-Power Teach

This class of beneficiaries provides assistance in teaching in Nigerian public schools, thereby ensuring smoother functioning of the nation's basic education system. They help in governmental primary and secondary schools in areas of teaching and instructor support to complement understaffing across the country. N-Power Teach is a programme that recruits young graduates willing to teach in elementary school. They serve as teaching assistants in

primary and secondary schools in Nigeria. They provide support in the classroom, assisting with instruction, school management, and other duties as required (Aderonmu, 2017).

iii. N-Tax

This aspect of the N-power programme involves tax administration and enhancement. The volunteers in this category work as community tax liaison officers for the tax administrators in their respective states. They are tasked with educating members of the community about tax compliance, including responding to questions raised online.

iv N-Agro

The N-Agro Programme is basically the agricultural development and promotion across the country. The sole objective of the programme is to develop the agricultural sector in the country and also to inculcate into Nigerian youths the culture of embarking on agricultural production for survival instead of depending on the government or its agencies on non-existent white-collar jobs. The youths in this area of the N-power programme are expected to be enlisted in at least one or two areas of agriculture such as fishing, crop farming or poultry farming, among others (Aderonmu, 2017).

Unemployment

Unemployment signifies the existence of a problem widespread in Nigeria, since its definition has been offered in multiple ways by academics and international organizations alike. Udu and Agu (2015) define it as a situation in which persons capable and willing to work fail to secure appropriate employment for themselves. The International Labour Organization (2017) describes such a group as being actively looking for work and yet remain unemployed. Hornby (2018) says it is a state of being without a job; meanwhile, Anyanwa (2008) considered the situation to occur when capable persons cannot find work at current market rates. Ekpo (2018) opined that unemployment arises when individuals are ready and willing to work but find no paying job available to them. The unemployment rate, expressed as a proportion of the labor force that is without job, varies depending on the conditions, which are, however, generally agreed upon in the definition of the labor force itself-being especially in respect of determining the criteria for an employed status.

Unemployment is a very serious problem in Nigeria and one of the oldest developmental crises (Akwara et al. 2013). The snag has turned into an alarming socio-economic issue; thus, efforts must be more than just in words. It affects the youths greatly; the other is impeding in economic growth for the nation (Ipaye 2019). According to Udu and Agu (2015), the number one factor that has given rise to increasing unemployment is the lack of reliable data on the actual magnitude of the problem. Ezie (2017) puts forward that the economic condition in Nigeria is such that a huge segment of the labor force cannot be absorbed, thereby fostering rising crime rates and social unrest. Entrepreneurship now receives the major thrust of the strategy. Unemployment, as defined by the International Labour Organization (1989), refers to a situation in which a very high segment of the population, willing and able to work, is unable to find jobs. However, the World Bank (2020) posits that a significant number of people resign voluntarily from paid employment to commence business activities, thereby contributing to

entrepreneurship growth.

Plenty of literature have elucidated some fundamental factors that contribute to youth unemployment in Nigeria. Adebayo (2019), Alanana (2018) among others, emphasize urbanization, rapid population increase, and rural-urban migration as chief causes of the problem. Nigeria's urban labour force grows much faster than the provision of jobs to meet the rising demand, thereby worsening the incidence of unemployment (National Bureau of Statistics, 2012). Corruption is another incubus as it means that funds that should have been used for development projects are often diverted through the back door to undermine the economy and entrepreneurship (Okafor, 2011). Adeniyi (2013) averred that if trends continue, the Nigerian labour force will grow substantially in forthcoming decades and unemployment will remain a big challenge. The unemployment rate was forecasted to be approximately 15.07% between 2011 and 2020, but this might become higher in the next two or three decades if proper policies are not put in place (Adeniyi, 2018).

Empirical Literature

The production of several hundreds of research works by various studies concerning the National Directorate of Employment programmes and their influence on employment generation in Nigeria yielded methods and results of diverse nature. Udofia and Udom (2020) tested the influence of the NDE programmes in Kaduna State using secondary data and interviews, concluding that these programmes were barely helping graduates in the search for jobs. Therefore, they suggested that the programme should be subjected to deeper analysis and perhaps overhaul. It further concluded that skill acquisition and training at the grassroots level might go a long way in curbing unemployment. In line with this, Emeh, Anyadike, and Ukah (2020) also studied some factors militating against unemployment in Nigeria and put forth the argument of the paradox wherein fast-paced economic growth is accompanied by increasing poverty. They insisted that for no other reason than the 2014 recruitment stampede tragedy, the government should remain fairly active in addressing youth unemployment.

An agricultural employment study was undertaken by James, Rebecca, and David (2020), who deployed a quantitative methodology to evaluate the success of the N-Agro programme in Akwa Ibom State. It was found that--to the extent that--the programme had distributed jobs to its beneficiaries, improving rural livelihoods. It was recommended that the development of agriculture infrastructure and access to markets through secondary support be promoted to maintain the positive implementation of this programme. Similarly, Roseline (2020), in her quantitative evaluation of health employment under the N-Health programme in Akwa Ibom State, revealed that the N-Health programme indeed significantly created job opportunities in the health sector while developing health services. Therefore, it was suggested that more investments be made in health infrastructure and that participant training continue.

In Anyadike et al. (2021), the potential worsening of unemployment in Nigeria was acknowledged. This paper gave an expert opinion: entrepreneurship should find a place in the national curriculum, and there should exist a purposeful reengineering of the NYSC scheme as it regards entrepreneurship for job creation. On the other hand, Adeyemi and Ogunyemi (2021) made an empirical analysis of the effects of Npower and found that there were positive effects on employment in reducing the period of unemployment and increasing levels of job

satisfaction; hence, their results emphasized the diversity of such programmes across demographic groups and recommended the scaling up and quality enhancement of training. Ibrahim and Aliyu (2022) also attempted to determine if Npower had any substantial impact on unemployment alleviation and found that there was indeed an improvement in employment levels; it also improved skills acquisition among the participants. The study thereby recommended that such interventions be evaluated so as to guide policy. Effiong (2022), finally, analyzed the regulatory barriers to N-Tech in Akwa Ibom. Using qualitative methods, the study found that bureaucratic inefficiency and excessive complexity in licensing stood as barriers to job creation. The study recommended that the regulations be simplified with incentives for N-Tech startups to improve job generation.

By their study of Nwankwo, 2022, the paper looked into the relationship between youth empowerment and the N-Power programme. Therefore, the study was design to measure the socio-economic status of the beneficiaries. The study adopted both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection to obtain enough evidence to support it. Findings of this research highlighted some strengths and weaknesses of the programme such as the acquisition of vocational skills and enhancement of avenues for the self-employment of youth and as such, the study recommends that the programme must always be assessed so that it does not succumb to irrelevance among Nigerian youths. Meanwhile, Ayodele and Ibrahim (2023) examined the N-Power scheme on youth employment via a national survey. The study concluded that the scheme positively impacted employment as most of the beneficiaries were either placed in employment or began to work for themselves; however, they noted some regional disparities in the efficacy of the programme and called for improved regional execution, alongside entrepreneurial resources and placement support strategies.

According to Adewale and Olaniyi, the study pertains to sustainability aspect of the Npower programme and whether it offered a permanent employment solution. A mixed method approach was adopted in the study with quantitative data gathered on retention in employment and qualitative information collected with respect to funding and programme design. The study went on to emphasize that funding should be made sustainable and that stakeholders should be involved wherever possible, so as to be able to collaborate on the long-term success of the programme. The study recommended the adoption of these initiatives to ensure sustainability for good. Okafor and Anyanwu (2023) carried out a study on the N-power programme and skills impartation for employability concerning Nigerian youths. The study reported that the programme enhanced the technical and soft skills of beneficiaries, including spheres such as communication and problem-solving. The study insists on skill development and entrepreneurial training as the solution to youth unemployment and economic empowerment.

While Musa and Abdullahi (2024) looked at the employment context with the purposes or against the generation of employment, wherein changes existed, in some instances positive growth was realised in the provision of skills and support for entrepreneurship, whereas in others, issues such as lack of long-term employment opportunities still persisted. Hence, the author recommended that greater coordination and monitoring of the scheme would enhance its effectiveness and scaling up. Ahmad and Hassan (2024), meanwhile, study different

contributions of Npower to skill development and employability in Nigeria. They detected an array of Npower impacts which contribute to improving the skills of the participants and increasingly ameliorate their job prospects. They thus suggested that N-power should focus more on targeted training for high-demand areas and evaluation-based job placement services. Training targeted to the relevant areas could be facilitated more, and cooperation with industry players should be encouraged to at least modify the objectives of the program to fall within the market needs.

N-Agro and Employment Generation in Akwa Ibom State.

Being a part of the broader Nigeria National Social Investment Programme (NSIP), N-Agro is therefore a strategy that works toward agricultural development and at the same time tackles unemployment in the socio-economic context of Akwa Ibom State. Having the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management, and Social Development as the government on the ground, the programme is geared toward increasing agricultural production and stimulating job opportunities nationwide for the growing population of youths (Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management, and Social Development, 2020). With its huge agricultural potential in the State and unemployment siege, N-Agro can thus become an important means through which the crossroads of these concerns can be addressed.

Hence, the strategic positioning of the N-Agro beneficiaries among different agricultural ventures in the Akwa Ibom State becomes necessary, not just in realizing an increase in agricultural production but in economically empowering the youth of this State. The programme equips the beneficiaries with new skills while continuously supplying them with equipment and machinery so that they can be kept busy in the various stages of production including those of crop, animal, and agro-processing. The programme serves as a means of ensuring food security by equipping indigent youths with the know-how and resources needed to undertake agriculture, provide the agro-sector as a means of livelihood with income, and create employment (Udofia&Udom, 2020).

Another idea about rural development and poverty alleviation mechanisms in Akwa Ibom State catalysed by N-Agro. Due to the grave involvement of the youth in agricultural activities, this energizes a movement in the rural areas, building an entrepreneurial spirit and undue dependence on oil revenues (which should be discouraged) in the area. When involved in production, processing, marketing, and distribution, these value chains provide an increased local economy for those participating, thereby contributing to inclusive growth and rural development (Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development, 2020).

The implementation of the N-Agro programme in Akwa Ibom is hindered by a lot of problems, which tend to make its implementation not so feasible. The processes include, firstly, inadequate access to farmland; secondly, lack of infrastructure; and thirdly, non-availability of support services. There is need for intervention to address these challenges whereby the government, actors in the private sector and development partners would come to the aid of the programme by way of providing sufficient resources, building the required infrastructure and

offering technical assistance to N-Agro beneficiaries (Udofia & Udom, 2020). In Akwa Ibom State, the N-Agro scheme stands as a major avenue of change in agriculture and for the generation of jobs for the growing unemployed youths within the State. The programme thus becomes an economic force alongside rural development and poverty alleviation within the State to enable youths to go into agriculture in earnest; hence, supportive measures, investment support, and concerted efforts must whittle away impediments toward realizing in full the promise of the N-Agro programme for agricultural development and job creation within Akwa Ibom State.

N-Power and Employment Generation

The N-Tech encompasses much latitude in view of the diverse technological inventions, skills development, and employment peculiarities in Akwa Ibom State against the fast-changing socio-economic fabric. Via this mechanism under the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management, and Social Development, youths are able to learn technical skills that are peculiar to the present era and that can be used for the generation of employment in several areas (Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management, and Social Development, 2020).

The N-Tech somehow attempts to tackle the complementary issues relating to the surge in the youth population and the burgeoning demand for skilled manpower in the State of Akwa Ibom, Nigeria. N-Tech imparts skills by training and supporting youths in various technological fields, including software development, digital marketing, cybersecurity, and data analysis, so that these young minds can thrive in the rapidly evolving digital economy (Udofia & Udom, 2020). These skills render them employable; they also encourage entrepreneurship and innovation, and thus economic growth and development within the state.

The N-Tech is contributing towards Social Development Processes and poverty alleviation measures in Akwa Ibom. In this context, technology fills the gaps in skills and creates more chances for gainful employment. This helps in economic generation, keeps unemployment low, and encourages social integration for the socially deprived communities. N-Tech-trained graduates will be working in making a digital economy, thus providing the groundwork for research and competition in industries such as IT, telecoms, or e-commerce (Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development, 2020).

With Akwa Ibom State at the helm, N-Tech becomes the hope spot for youths who want to acquire relevant skills and opportunities in the digital space. Technical skills for innovation-oriented entrepreneurship may be further harnessed to spur economic growth, social empowerment, and poverty reduction within the state. However, implementation challenges warrant a sustained investment in the partnerships and interventions in specific areas so that the full focus can be cast upon N-Tech to help it fulfill its untapped potential as a vehicle for technology development and generation of employment in Akwa Ibom State.

N-power Programme in Nigeria, Akwa Ibom State Perspective: the Challenges

Poverty comes in the gamut of hierarchal problems with unemployment under the Nigerian skies, where a high number of her people are condemned to extreme poverty.

According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2020), 17.7 million people were supposedly poor in 1988, which then reached 66.7 million in 2004, and later estimations stated that about 75% of the populace was below the poverty line in 2022. This very development almost led to Nigeria being crowned the poverty capital of the world, having dethroned India, bearing 86.9 million of the extremely poor (Bisong, 2023). However, over half of Nigerian youths are unemployed and are faring severely (UNDP, 2021; Anyebe, 2022). These, beyond empirical datum, are clear indicators of the growing divide between unemployment and poverty, decrying the systematic breakdown that needs immediate redress.

While the Nigerian government has tried to curb unemployment-a plague-It has looked into different ways of doing so. N-Power being the largest of the interventions, it was initiated by the former President Muhammadu Buhari to absorb Nigerian youths aged 18-34 years in its creche., Therefore, both the graduate and the non-graduate were targeted under this scheme in those years. The programme intends to teach skills that can be used in diverse sectors, namely, Teaching (N-Teach), Health (N-Health), Agriculture (N-Agro), and Technical (N-Build, and N-Tech), with a view to equipping the recipients with sufficient skills such that either they can be employed or become independent in establishing their businesses. (N-SIP, 2018; National Employment Policy, 2017). Yet, the systemic constraints still prevent a lot of young people from getting jobs despite a large number of youths being benefitted.

So far from it, the N-Power programme has experienced massive challenges ever since it was instituted. Being four thousand participants from Ikwa-Ibom, stipends are paid monthly; therefore, the programme has not been able to have any significant impact on unemployment in the state. There are some major concerns: poor coordination, lack of supervision, and blatant neglect (participants absent themselves without whatsoever penalty). At the end of the day, the issue is on the extent to which the programme could solve youth unemployment (Okoro & Bassey, 2018). Some feel that corruption and inefficiency, together with political unwillingness, have reduced the implementation and work of the programme to the lowest possible levels after huge investment, unless it is found that poverty could otherwise have been erased through the money channeled into the programme (Abu, 2015; Anyebe, 2020).

Some writers maintain that the N-Power programme has somewhat helped alleviate youth unemployment (Abayomi, 2020), while others contest the notion (Effiong 2022; Akujuru & Enyioku, 2019). Research also shows that the programme has neither significantly equipped the participants with job skills nor given them opportunity for gainful employment in the longer run (Obukohwo, 2020). The situation stands further aggravated by the sudden withdrawal of the N-Power volunteers who were supposed to be given an exit package but had none; this exit package was to support them but without which the programme itself stands crippled (Okoro & Bassey, 2018).

Programmes such as these have undergone other challenges owing to poor coordination at various levels of government. Problems central to identification have remained unresolved for the purpose of beneficiary targeting. Similarly, they have found beneficiary identification and targeting systems to be more of a bottleneck than a force for increasing the programme to its successful implementation scale. Another pressing challenge is the lack of an all-encompassing and credible database to serve as one of the very few tools available for planning and decision-

making. Lack of an acceptable M&E system; ill functioning grievance and redress mechanisms, and so on, have until now been the major factors limiting the positive impacts of the programme. However, donor-government-partner coordination always reduced to an optimum level of alignment between objectives and resources. Of late, the program's integrity has suffered a blow due to the absence of a transparent and effective payment system to facilitate the direct Government-to-Person (G2P) payments by the Government. Apart from the magnitude and coverage of the programmes, the accountability mechanisms are insufficient to provide adequate feedback and measure the overall impact (Okoro & Bassey, 2018).

Theoretical Framework

The Elite Theory of public policy-making popularized by Anderson(1975) is used as theoretical framework of the study. The theory addresses, in a very broad way, levels of power and influence that characterize the composition of societies. Anderson extensively contemplated how elites draw their political processes and social structures in view of studies done by early thinkers like Vilfredo Pareto and Gaetano Mosca (Anderson, 1975). Central to Elite theory is that power structure responsible for policy making is manned by a small but powerful group of individuals of high status enhanced by prestige or salient social position who shape social values and influence policy making. Situating the N-Power programme's implementation in Nigeria within Elite theory framework, it is argued that it reflects the interests of a small, powerful elite rather than the masses, leading to corruption, poor monitoring, and resource misappropriation despite the programme's good intentions to alleviate youth unemployment and poverty. Research indicates that the governing elites make decisions about the programme, and the stipend amounts, for example, don't align with extreme poverty lies, pointing to a disconnect between policy implementation and the true need of the beneficiaries.

Without the support of the elites, such a project may never see the light of day. The elites ensure that the beneficiaries' ranks are legitimated and accepted by the masses. However, this also implies that the implementation of N-Power program could be deviated and co-opted into serving the interests of the elites rather than the objectives towards the intended beneficiaries; this corresponds to Anderson's conception that the elites have to keep themselves in position through some form of strategic interactions with the larger society (Bisong, 2023). Anderson also presents a version of fluid groups of elites, a very observable variant from the shifting alliances and rivalries that exist among political factions in Akwa Ibom State. These emerging dynamics shall henceforth inform how N-Power resources will be distributed and certain groups favored over others. As a result, elite competition influences the program's outcome in a manner that potentially leads to an uneven distribution of benefits among groups and thereby reinforces existing power hierarchies.

Corroborating this view, Ayinde (2008), averred that "only a matter of coincidence if the policy decisions of the elite reflect the interests of the masses", as they sometime do. For instance, in Borno State, the N-Power Scheme to reasonable extent has reflected interests of the beneficiaries as large chunk of activities in the scheme is service and rural based.

Research Methodology

Descriptive and documentary research methods were employed. Secondary data were used in the study were obtained from books, journals, academic articles, newspapers, and the Internet, depending on relevance and accessibility to enrich the study. Content Analysis was then used to evaluate each variable built around sub themes. In this way, the researchers tried to gather the most complete and balanced data for the investigation.

Discussion of Findings

The study on the impact of N-Power toward reducing unemployment in Akwa Ibom state considered programs pertaining to N-Tech, N-Teach, and N-Health. The result shows that N-Power has not been a significant employment-generating factor in the areas of health, teaching, and technology due to poor implementation. This observation agrees with that of Udo and Ekanem (2021) when they stated that the N-Power program in Nigeria never achieved the set goals because of a weak curriculum. The curriculum usually fails to keep abreast with changes in current practice and technology in the healthcare industry and, therefore, does not adequately equip participants with the relevant skills to be able to succeed in a fast-developing industry. A lack of proper training on digital health technologies, patient management, and healthcare delivery practices poses a challenge in preparing the youth adequately for job pursuit in the health sector (Eyo & Akpan, 2020). Furthermore, Inyang and Etim (2019) also noted the theory-practice disconnect within N-Health and observed that limited opportunities for clinical placements and actual hands-on training greatly detract from the effectiveness of this initiative. This leads to graduates being unable to apply what they were taught to real-life healthcare situations, thus weakening the program as a vehicle for acquiring skills.

Drawing from the status reports, it can be said that the program has largely remained insignificant in providing employment to the youths through imparting modern agricultural skills to them. Thus the studies could find no worthy relationship between enrolment into the N-Agro program and employment generation for the youths in agriculture. Supporting this view are Ajayi et al. (2021) who maintain that many agricultural training programs in Nigeria, including those under the so-called N-Agro, mostly do not have curricula that adequately cater for the present-day and local intents and needs of their beneficiaries. These programs mostly teach outdated agricultural and farming methods, which are not in keeping with modern agricultural methods and hence land applicability-the very core of practical usefulness. Further, Akinwumi, (2020) and some others found that lack of infrastructure, such as poor irrigation facilities and nonavailability of improved seeds, limited the practicing of modern farming techniques by the youths trained above. Such-a-scenario-with-lack-of-infrastructures-and-resources-will-prevent-the-high-quality-trainings-from-being-provided,-thus-hampering-the-youths'-ability-to-think-of-agriculture-as-a-lucrative-profession. Moreover, Okereke and Mbah (2022) shed light on the increasing hindrances to funding for the ex-NAgro participants. These beneficiaries find themselves worthy of neither credit nor start-up funds post-training, disenfranchising the profitable application of the acquired skills in agriculture. This negative action is aggravated by the fact that the program does not in any way facilitate the integration of its participants into existing agricultural markets, driving a wedge between them and marketing their recently acquired skills and products (Ibrahim & Olaniyi, 2019).

The survey further showed another fact: gaining employment by acquiring technology-related skills was not therefore, among the objectives of the N-Tech program. The training, being fairly generic, did not make the acquired skills adequately compatible with local industries, thereby narrowing the avenues of job creation available to the trainees. In the Nwafor, Eze, and Ogbu (2019) view, the quality of N-Tech training is, in many centers, hampered by the use of aged equipment and poor facilities. Without the required infrastructure, those programmes could not have been able to impart the really needed hands-on training; hence, the resultant poor effects. Another highlighted factor was the few opportunities available for graduates to gain work experience through internships or placements if not strategically aligned with local companies (Ojo and Olatunji, 2021). This lack of collaboration prevented the creation of a network that would have assisted youth in obtaining jobs in the technology industry.

Conclusion

Akwa Ibom State has been exposed to huge operational lapses affecting the outputs of the skill acquisition programs. These trainings are meant to empower the youths to secure business or employment; however, in the case of Akwa Ibom State, bigger N-health, N-Agro, and N-Tech skill acquisition programs are proving to be largely ineffective. Without the sweeping reforms in the curriculum to emphasize on practical training, in infrastructure and industrial partnerships, the programs may never see the fulfillment of their promise for skills and jobs. This, therefore, implies that there is a strong argument by this study for a rethinking on how these training programs are being carried out so that the training can adequately address some particular problems that confront the endangered local economy and the youth in their backside ± immediate environment.

Recommendations

i. Make curricula more relevant and keep training materials and equipment up to date:

Basically, the N-Power programs-N-Health, N-Teach, and N-Tech-are the ones to have their curricula updated in accommodating alterations in their respective sectors. The updates may touch on changes in technology, healthcare, and teaching so that participants learn contemporary skills that are wanted by the market. Standard supplies may be furnished to the training centers. For example, in healthcare, digital health tools may be among those needed. Modern teaching aids/instructional materials and technology devices shall be furnished to the training centers such that the training will gain actual worth.

ii. Enhance Practical Training and Industry Collaboration:

Internships are all-important losses, alongside the increasing gaps of theory versus real-life. Hence, partnership should be formed by local industries, health institutions, and educational organizations with N-Power programs for internships, job placements, and supervised training opportunities for the participants. Thus, through these partnerships, the participants will gain some practical experience that will increase their employability in their trades.

iii. Fund and Market Linkage Strengthening:

Programmes like N-Agro should scale programs that help participants get financial assistance and credit upon finishing their training. They could, for instance, provide young farmers and technology entrepreneurs with startup grants or loans. These connections to actual agricultural and technology markets will provide participants with skills and products to sell, thereby retaining employment.

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