

## **EFFECT OF N-POWER YOUTH EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMME ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF NIGERIA, 2015-2022**

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### **Abstract**

This study examined the effect of N-Power youth empowerment programme on socio-economic development of Nigeria. Specifically, the paper appraised the extent to which the N-Power Programme has improved the living standard of Nigerian Youths, assessed the extent to which the N-Power programme has reduced unemployment rate and to investigate the extent to which the N-power programme has contributed to increase in Gross Domestic Product of the country. The research adopted the Jean-Jacques Reousseau "Social Contract Theory" (Propounded in 1762) as its theoretical model of analysis for linking the conjectures of youth empowerment and socio-economic development amid other duties government owe the citizens. Findings revealed that the programme has helped many unemployed young Nigerians across the country with sustenance stipends. But in terms of socio-economic development of the country; it has not significantly encouraged increase in the living standard of the youths, it has not significant reduce the unemployment rate because the youths have been unable to develop the skills, knowledge, technology and adaptability to enable to enter and remain in employment throughout their working lives. For GDP, the effect has not been appreciably felt by the nation as its GDP has not increased. The study summed up that the N-Power programme introduced by the Federal Government as a social safety net to reduce the rate of youths unemployment plaguing the country, is 'a right step', but in the 'wrong direction' as Nigerian youths are still confronted with problems of poor living standard, increase unemployment rate. The study therefore recommended amongst others that the N-Power programme should be sustained and continued but with proper implementation of transition process to permanent job options. This can be achieved through a performance grading system that would not only motivate the N-Power volunteers to sit-up during the programme, but also would meritoriously link up graduates exiting from the scheme to corresponding organizations (both in the public and private sectors); also provide grants/loans to enable them start and maintain business that will also employ others as this will go a long way in contributing to economic development of the country.

### **Background of the Study**

Socio-economic development is one of the most fundamental development challenges currently confronting Nigeria, with the rate of youth unemployment in Nigeria put at 54% of the population. Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and ranked seventh in the world with a population of 206.14 million based on projections of the latest United Nations data (World Population Review, 2022). Nigeria has the largest economy in Africa, ranked 138th in the world based on her nominal GDP of 96.122 billion and the per capita income projection of \$2,400.45 by the end of 2022 (World Population Review, 2020). As impressive as the above figures may appear youth unemployment has been one of the major problems facing Nigeria and affecting its socio-economic development. According to Anyanwu (2017), a high level of unemployment and underemployment is one of the critical socio-economic development problems facing Nigeria and her youths.

The magnitude of poverty in Nigeria is worrisome. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2019) has classified Nigeria as one of the poorest nations on the human development index. The report of UNDP (2022) also reveals that in Nigeria, even though the proportion of people who are multidimensionally poor has remained constant at just over 50% over the past decade (upto 2017), the actual number of people who are multidimensionally poor increased from 86 million to 98 million over the same period. Also, important to note from the report is that when compared to the national poverty line which measures income/consumption, a larger proportion of Nigerians (51%) are multidimensionally poor than those that are income poor (46%). There is also inequality, deprivations experienced by the poor and lack of essentials such as clean water, sanitation, adequate nutrition or primary education for the children. While the labour force grows, with an increasing proportion of youth, employment growth is inadequate to absorb labour market entrants. As a result, youth are especially affected by unemployment. Anyanwu (2017) reveals that young people are seen doing jobs of low quality, working long hours for low wages, engaging in dangerous work or receiving only short-term and/or found in informal employment arrangements or unemployed.

The inadequate employment situation of youth has a number of socioeconomic, political and moral consequences. This has resulted in poverty in Nigeria which is chronic and rising. Paradoxically, the issue of unemployment has negatively contributed to the menace of poverty in Nigeria and lack of socio-economic development. The issues of poverty and youth restiveness had been in existence since the evolution of Nigeria as a nation. Report of the Federal Office of Statistics (1999) now Federal Bureau of Statistics, showed that between the late 70s and early '90s, the poverty level in Nigeria stood at 27 percent, but subsequently jumped to 46 percent as at 1996 when most countries within the poverty bracket were moving toward complete eradication of poverty in their respective states (Osagie, 2017).

Certain factors were responsible for the astronomical rise in the poverty level as well as stunted economic development in Nigeria. Such factors include mismanagement of the country's scarce resources by our corrupt and dishonest leaders; long military leadership in the country; abandonment of agriculture for oil economy and unstable economy (Eminue, 2015; Igbuzor, 2016).

Apparently, successive administrations in the country have at various times initiated some programmes aimed at addressing socio-economic development and poverty problems as well as unemployment and its concomitant effects on Nigerian State. Eminue (2015) noted that the military regime of Gen Olusegun Obasanjo initiated Operation Feed the Nation programme. Under Shehu Shagari regime (1979-1983), the administration introduced the policy of "Green revolution" aimed at encouraging Nigerians to develop interest on reviving agricultural sector as a strategy for reducing poverty and unemployment in the country. The Babangida military regime (1985-1993) introduced the Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) and the pet project of her wife called better Life for Rural Women. Again, the military regime of Late Gen. Sanni Abacha launched the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) with the utmost intention of fighting poverty nationwide. Dike (2012) asserted that most of these programmes by their contents were very laudable, but their implementation strategies were window dressing and cosmetic in nature,

especially as their impacts did not reduce the level of poverty, improve the living standard of people and reduce unemployment in the country.

Chief Olusegun Obasanjo after assumption of office as a civilian president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in 1999, instituted Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) by the year 2000. Unfortunately, the policy package did little or nothing to address poverty problems in Nigeria (Joseph, 2006).

Consequently, the programme was re-organised and renamed Poverty Eradication Programme (PEP). Nomenclatures notwithstanding, the rural populace who were supposed to be the target beneficiaries of these programmes never knew of the existence of such initiatives, not to talk of their implementations (Igbuzor, 2016). With the laudable implementation of these poverty reduction and empowerment programmes, poverty remains

widespread. The poverty rate in over half Nigeria's 36 states is above the national average of 69%. High poverty reflects rising unemployment, estimated at 23.1% in 2018, up from 14.2% in 2016 (African Development Bank, 2020).

This problem has limitations on skills and opportunities for employment in the formal sector. Government social programs—N-Power and other youth empowerment schemes—are meant to address unemployment. Particularly, the administration of the Muhammad Buhari-led government instituted National Social Investments Programme (N-SIP), under which N-power was implemented and coordinated as a strategy to address the ravaging problems associated with youth and socio-economic development in Nigeria. N-Power is a platform for diversifying the economy. N-Power is preparing young Nigerians for a knowledge economy, equipped with world-class skills and certification, making them become innovators and movers in the domestic and global markets. This will positively affect Nigeria to have a pool of software developers, hardware service professionals, animators, graphic artists, building services professionals, artisans and others. N-Power also focuses on providing our non-graduates with relevant technical and business skills that enhance their work and livelihood (Eminue, 2015). This, of course, gave rise to the constitution of the presidential panel to package and streamline all the poverty reduction programmes and agencies of the government. In line with the above strides to make both graduates and non-graduates useful to the nation and themselves as well as reducing poverty among living Nigerians and contributing to Nigerian economic growth, the federal government launched N-Power to tackle some of these problems.

According to the Ministry of Social Development, the programme is a tripod of 'learn-work and transition into entrepreneurship' targeted at unemployed Nigeria youths to improve their employability and income status across all the states in the country (Nwaobi, 2022).

The specific objective of N-power programme are to: intervene and directly improve the livelihood of a critical mass of young unemployed Nigerians; develop a qualitative system for improving youth's employability, enhance entrepreneurial and technical skills, and provide opportunity for transforming fresh graduates to become entrepreneurs of their own micro-small enterprises; etc. The programme would ensure that each beneficiary learns and practices all that is necessary to create work and generate income. In fact, this investment in youth development targets some of the perennial inadequacies in service delivery, such as the low teacher to pupil ratio in public primary schools; high rate of preventable diseases and lack of taxable persons within the tax net (Olorunsola, 2022).

Consequently, the various categories of N-POWER include the N-Power Graduate Category of N-Teach, N-Health, N-Tax and N-Agric, then the Non-Graduate Category of N-knowledge, N-Build, N-Power Junior and N-Power Innovation. As at August 2018, five hundred thousand (500, 000) graduate participants were deployed to serve in the teaching, health, agriculture, tax and monitoring spheres; with a monthly stipend of N30, 000. Operationally, each of these N-Power volunteers were meant to be given devices with relevant content for continuous learning so as to facilitate their ability to successfully implement the selected vocation, while enabling them take ownership of their lives. Also, about 20,000 non-graduate participants in the N-Build category were trained in the 36 states, including the Federal

Capital Abuja, with monthly stipend of N10,000 for three months period in audited skill centres with tool boxes to facilitate learning and self-reliance. Afterward, these beneficiaries were meant to be placed as interns for nine months through close collaboration with relevant agencies (Ibrahim, 2021).

As a beacon of hope, the N-Power programme was broadly meant to boost employment growth and transform the lives of many young Nigerians who perhaps have lost confidence in their government and the systematic failure that had left them stranded without jobs, skills and sustainable means of livelihood. Odey and Sambe (2019) aver that 3 years into the introduction of N-power, a lot of unemployment youths had been trained in the field of agriculture, enterprise and most importantly had acquired survival skills and a potential to be employers of labour. But presently in Nigeria, the effectiveness of this programme in achieving its core purpose of socio-economic development and employment growth has raised research concerns; hence this study.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Youth unemployment is a problem to every country and youth empowerment serves as an antidote to the menace. There are several challenges facing developing countries, to which Nigeria is not an exemption. According to Aliyu (2012), majority of the population in developing countries are averagely poor. In Nigeria specifically, there are a number of graduates who are jobless after spending years in the higher institutions. Their lifestyles are associated with poverty because majority of them could not attend to some important and basic needs. Therefore, they perceive any poverty alleviation programmes such as N-power as a means of relief and pleasure. The poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria are means through which the government aims to revamp and reconstruct the economy. The high incidence of poverty in the country has made poverty alleviation strategies important policy options over the years with varying results (Oladeji & Abiola, 2016). Having observed the increased rates of unemployment which has connection with poverty and other socio-economic problems, N-Power according to the Punch (2016) set to address the challenge of youth unemployment and stunted socio-economic development by providing a structure for large scale and relevant work skills acquisition and development while linking its core and outcomes to fixing inadequate public services and stimulating the larger economy. The modular programmes under N-Power ensure that each beneficiary learns and practises most of what is necessary to find or create work (The Punch, 2016). Several studies (Obadan, 2016; Ugoh & Ukpere, 2016; Ogwumike, 2017) have shown that many programmes implemented as strategies to combat youth restiveness, unemployment, poverty and many developmental challenges have not successfully impacted on the development of the country. Gaps are also observed that the challenges hindering the success of these programmes were not adequately addressed.

The failure to identify and address those gaps are capable of inhibiting the efforts of various governments in developing the country through efficient and effective policies. It is obvious from several studies that poverty reduction strategies in Nigeria have failed to achieve their stated objectives (Osagie, 2007; Nwuke, 2014; Ugoh & Ukpere, 2016). It, therefore, requires concerted efforts by all to contribute to the success of this all-important, elusive and developmental project. Such efforts can only be meaningful if it stems from an empirical study in order to support the government to realize the global lofty objective of eradicating poverty on national development. It is against this statement that the researcher decided to assess the impact of Npower programme on the socioeconomic livelihoods of the beneficiaries and identify challenges associated with the implementation of Npower programme through the beneficiaries in Nigeria.

In 2015, President Muhammadu Buhari pledged through his N-power via-a-vis the National Social Investment Programmes (NSIP) that three (3) million jobs would be provided by his administration yearly. Though the N-power programme was hyped in different for a as the magic bullet to kill the persistent unemployment problem that have limited the socio-economic development of the country, but seems not to have live up to expectations. It's quite worrisome still, that after seven (7) years, the N-Power programme as plausible as it may have seem, appears not have practically solved the problem it was fashioned for which is to reduce unemployment and increase socio-economic development of the country. Statistics indicate that Nigeria's youth unemployment rate has more than triple in the last Seven years from 13.% in December 2016 to 32.5% in 2021 and 33.3% in first quarter 2022 (Statista, 2022). It seems that the scheme is not providing solution to the high unemployment rate ravaging Nigeria's economy. Against this backdrop the following questions arose:

1. To what extent has the N-power programme improved the living standard of Nigerian youths?
2. To what extent has the N-Power programme contributed in reducing unemployment among Nigerian youths?
3. To what extent has the N-Power programme contributed in increased (GDP) Gross Domestic Product of Nigeria?

### **Objective of the Study**

The broad objective of this study is to examine the effect of N-Power youth empowerment programme on socio-economic development of Nigeria. Specifically, this study south to:

1. To examine the extent the N-power programme have improved the living standard of Nigerian youths.
- 1 To determine the extent the N-Power programme have contributed in reducing unemployment among Nigerian youths.
- 2 To examine the extent the N-Power programme have contributed in increased (GDP) Gross Domestic Product of Nigeria?

### **Implications of the Study**

By implication, this study will serve as a wake-up call to the relevant authorities to consider areas and how they are not getting it right, so as to retool effectively in administering the N-Power programme to properly address the problem of stunted socio-economic development and unemployment in Nigeria. There are so many programmes that have been organized by successive governments in Nigeria with practical failure and/or near-success syndrome. Yet, finding out what has been going wrong with the various intervention programmes during this period of high unemployment has remained a mere rhetoric. This study therefore has empirical implications because probing the effect of N-Power youth empowerment programme will help point out the way forward to Nigerian Economic Policy Formulators, Development Economists, Public Administrators and the entirety of stakeholders. It will further serve as a nugget of solution for ameliorating constraints undermining government intervention programmes.



Furthermore, this study has significant implication for future research undertakings in the area of development administration as well as human resource management since concerned researchers, scholars and students can safely anchor on the outcome of this investigation as a fresh platform for further studies to emerge.

## **Conceptual Review**

### **The Concept of Youth**

The United Nations (2005) cited in Oluwasegun (2018) had defined youth as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood's independence; but for statistical consistency across regions, it defines youth as those persons between the ages of 15 to 24 years. Though this definition was globally recognized, the International Labour Organization (2006) cited in Krishnan and Sethuramlingam (2017) noted that the transition from childhood (dependency) to adulthood's independent can take longer time for people in poor countries; leading to the extended age based on a country's socioeconomic dynamics.

The United Nations Youth Charter therefore recognizes youth as people between ages 15 and 35 (Oluwasegun, 2018). In Nigeria, prior to the emergency of the 2019 National Youth Policy 'youth' was defined as those between 19-35 years. However, the new Policy has changed the above classification; hence a youth in Nigeria is a person between 18-29 years (Unini, 2020). It is however important to maintain that despite the age fluctuations, the most vital point is that, the youth are indispensable fact of any given society. Youths are termed leaders of tomorrow and the backbone of a nation, since the strength of a nation lies in the hands of the youths who are needed in the right texture to serve as oil lubricant for the wheels of change and sustainable development (Chinnah, 2019). It is widely held that the task of developing the youths to enhance societal growth rests squarely on the shoulder of the state that beholds them.

### **Concept of Youths Unemployment**

Unemployment can be defined as a state of joblessness, whereby people of working age (15-65 years) who are actively searching for employment are unable to find suitable livelihood earning employment (Ndzwayiba, 2020). Unemployment therefore occurs when someone is willing and able to work but does not have a paid job. Going by this definition, it's important to note that to be considered unemployed, a person must be an active member of the labour force and in search of remunerative work. The International Labour Organization (2014) cited in Kurten (2021) recognizes unemployment as a global problem, but noted that it's more manifest in developing countries like Nigeria where chronic youth unemployment is very evident.

In defining youth unemployment, the ILO notes that a young unemployment person has to fit the conditions of ages 16 and 35, not having a job (meaning he/she has no work during the reference period), and being actively looking for a job. Kurten (2021) explains that unemployment is clustered and categorized based on the average populace of active job-seekers without employment, and within that cluster categories' the number of unemployed you is revealed by sampling out overall data. Going by this, Nigeria has a relatively young population with the current median age put at 18.4 years for both male/female gender; and out of a population of 2018,994,835 people in 2021, about 53.57% are at peak

productive age (15-35); putting Nigeria unemployment youth at around 54% of the population (World Population Review, 2021).

### **Youth Empowerment**

Youth empowerment simply put by Oluwasegun (2018), is a process whereby young people are encouraged to take charge of their lives. The United Nations (2012) defined youth empowerment as intentionally designed development programmes by government aimed at creating opportunities that will encourage and develop the youths to become morally responsible, self-reliant and financially productive citizens. The implication of the foregoing definitions is that the onus of youth empowerment in a country lies with the government. Suffice to say that youth empowerment ought to be a macro socioeconomic objective of every responsible government.

World Bank Group (2017) conceptualized youth empowerment as the process of increasing the capacity of young individuals to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. They further explained that positive youth empowerment is the intentional efforts of government agencies, communities, schools, as well as other youth and adults to provide opportunities for youth to enhance their interest, skills, and abilities into their adulthoods. This definition for youth to enhance their interests, skills, and abilities into their adulthoods. This definition clearly implies that while youth empowerment is government responsibility; it however would involve collective efforts for it to be positive. No wonder Idris (2018) in this context defined Youth empowerment a collective approach to stop all forms of marginalization and negligence against the youths and to give them equal opportunity and access to education, financial control, entrepreneur capacity, political participation, leadership etc.

### **Socio-economic Development**

Socio-economic development can be defined as the progressive reinforcement of a socio-economic organization, quantitative and qualitative dimension towards a higher level of efficiency, well being, justice and democracy. Although existing literature offers a range of definitions on employability, McQuaid and Lindsay (2015) aver that many policy-makers have recently used the term as shorthand for 'an individual's employability skills and attributes'. Literarily, employability implies 'the character or quality of being employable', according to the UK Government (1997) cited in Cheng, Adekola, Albia and Cai (2022), employability means the development of skills and adaptable workforces in which all those capable of work are encouraged to develop the skills, knowledge, technology and adaptability to enable them to enter and remain in employment throughout their working lives. Thus, employability has to do with supporting the capacity of an individual to achieve meaningful employment for sustainable livelihood. Of note is the emphasis of the United Nations (2019) on employability, advocating that all countries need to review, re-thing and re-orient their education, vocational training and labour market policies to facilitate the school-learn to work transition and to give young people a head start in working life.

Meanwhile entrepreneurship is used to describe the relative capacity to become employment creators (Stan et al., 2018). Thus, entrepreneurship is used to describe creativity, innovativeness, risk taking and organizational processes and functions of individuals who initiate, nurture and run a business venture. Etuk, Etuk and Reuben (2014) further explain that it involves supporting people to acquire the right skills

to enable them identify opportunities, create or improve new or existing ideas, technologies, products or services. Suffice to say that entrepreneurship entails improving skills and competency in starting, building and maintain one's own successful business to the extent that it creates other jobs for people and further contributes to the economy.

### **The Concept of N-Power**

N-Power is an empowerment programme of the National Social Investment Programmes (NSIP) of the Federal Government of Nigeria devised in 2015. Nwaobi (2022) explains that it is the employability and entrepreneurship scheme aimed at imbibing the learn-work-entrepreneurship culture in youth between the ages of 18 and 35, with a paid volunteering programme of two-year duration. Structurally, there is the N-Power volunteer corps which is the post-tertiary engagement initiative for graduate youths placed on a N30,000 paid volunteering programme of two-year duration. Operationally, the graduate were to undertaken their primary tasks in identified public services within their proximate communities. They were also entitled to computing services that will contain information necessary for their specific engagement as well as information for their continuous training. Then N-Power programme also focuses on providing non-graduates with relevant technical and business skills that enhance their work outlook (livelihood); for both graduates and non-graduates to be able to learn, build skills and then transition into industries and businesses (Olorunsola, 2022).

### **Contextual Review**

#### **Contributing Factors of Unemployment in Nigeria**

Rapid population growth is major unemployment causality as Nigeria is the most populous nation in Africa with a population of 208, 994, 835 people in 2021 at population growth rate of 2.57% (Reuters, 2021). It is argued that the high population growth rate has resulted in the rapid growth of the labour force, which is far outstripping the supply of jobs (Ndzwayiba, 2020).

Urban unemployment is growth progressively worse due to rural to urban migration with youths moving to urban areas hoping to secure lucrative employment in the industries. Meanwhile, there is the concentration of social amenities in the urban centres, such that rural area are neglected in the allocation of socioeconomic opportunities and in skills acquisition/employment for employment growth (Amrevurayire, 2019).

With Nigeria low standard of education some scholars argue that as far as the formal sector is concerned, the average Nigeria graduate is not employable; hence does not possess skills needed by the employers of labour for a formal employment. This is mostly attributed to our education system as the course contents of most tertiary education in Nigeria lack entrepreneurial content that could have enabled graduates to become job creators rather than job seekers. Besides, access to entrepreneurial training such as tailoring, computer and other vocation are constrained by access to capital to start-up their own venture after the training (Aja and Eze, 2019).

Nigeria is seen as hostile to both foreign and domestic investment due to lack steady and sustainable power supply amid energy crises, leading to all types of business depending on generators for their operation at huge cost of petrol plus generator maintenance. As the industries and factories are closing



shops and/or relocating to friendlier economic environment, workers are laid off and prospect of recruiting new unemployed youths are dashed; are dashed; Ndzwayiba (2020) notes that all these exacerbate the crisis of youth unemployment in Nigeria.

Scholars aver that corruption is a phenomenon that has eaten deep into fabric of the Nigerian society, robbing the country of developing a vibrant economic base. Johnny and Ayawie (2020) emphasize that funds meant for development projects have been misappropriated, diverted, or embezzled. Duada et al., (2019) argued that corruption robs Nigeria of the changes of using its rich mineral revenue in the last 50 years to develop a vibrant economy that would create jobs for the youths in various sectors of the economy; thus exacerbating unemployment.

### **Objective and Categories of the N-Power Programme**

The N-Power programme was designed to help young Nigerians acquire and develop life-long skills that would turn them into solution providers in their communities. Broadly, N-Power is aimed at inculcating the learn-work-entrepreneurship culture in Nigeria youth; and according to the Ministry of Social Development, the programme is a tripod of 'learn-work and transition into entrepreneurship' targeted at unemployed Nigerian youths to improve their employability and income status across all the states in the country (Nwaobi, 2022).

Its specific objective are to: intervene and directly improve the livelihood of a critical mass of young unemployed Nigerians; develop a qualitative system for improving youth's employability; enhance entrepreneurial and technical skills, and provide opportunity for transforming fresh graduates to become entrepreneurs of their own micro-small enterprises; amongst others. N-Power would ensure that each beneficiary learns and practices all that is necessary to create work and generate income (Olorunsola, 2022). Consequently, the various categories of N-Power include the N-Power Graduate Category of N-Teach, N-Health, N-Tax and N-Agric; then the Non-Graduate Category of N-Knowledge, N-Build, N-Power Junior and N-Power Innovation.

- (i) T-Teach: The N-Power Teaching programme engages qualified graduates for the benefit of basic education delivery in Nigeria. N-Teahc volunteers are developed as teaching assistant in primary and secondary schools across Nigeria to work as support teachers assisting with lessons, school management and other functions within the schools, as well as taking basing education to children in marginalized communities. As a component of the N-Teach category, there is the N-Teach (STEM) which engages young graduates with the skills and interest in computer programming to assist in the implementation of the Federal Government's STEM programme for primary and secondary schools (Nwaobi, 2022).
- (ii) N-Health: Through the N-Power Health programme, young graduates who from part of the 500,000 participants are trained to work as public health assistants, teaching preventive health to community members including pregnant women, children families and individuals, as well trained to provide basic diagnostic services (Olorunsola, 2022).
- (iii) N-Agric: N-Power Agro deals with volunteers mean to function as intermediaries between research and farmers by operating as facilitators and communicators, helping farmers in their decision-making and ensuring that appropriate knowledge is implemented to obtain the greatest yields in farms (Dauda, Adeyeye, Yakubu and Oni, 2019).

- (iv) N-Knowledge: Is the Federal Government's first step towards diversifying to a knowledge economy functions alongside the strategic innovation hubs across the country, meant to provide incubation and acceleration of the technology and creative industries. The N-knowledge is a 'Training-to-Jobs' initiative, to really ensure that participants can get engaged in the marketplace in an outsourcing capacity as freelancers, as employees and as entrepreneurs (N-Power, 2017).
- (v) N-Tax: Is the voluntary Asset and income Declaration scheme (VAIDS) seeks to encourage non-compliant and partially compliant taxpayers to voluntarily declare their correct income and assets and then pay the appropriate tax due to the government. Essentially, the N-tax scheme was meant for one year after which participants who has performed well would be offered job opportunities by the relevant tax authorities while the remaining participants were to be transferred to N-Teach to conclude their program duration (Dauda et al, 2019).
- (vi) N-Build: Is a vocational training component of the N-Power, for the training and certification of unemployed Nigerian youths aimed at building highly competent and skilled workforce of technicians, artisans and service professionals. It's divided into 7 trade disciplines: automobile, carpentry and joinery, electrical, installations, masonry, painting and decorating, plumbing and pipefitting, welding and fabrication (Nwaobi, 2022).

### **Challenges of the N-Power Programme**

The N-Power programme is said to have some challenges in the way and manner the programme was designed and being handled. They include:

#### **(i) Poor Programme Planning**

It is widely held that when a design or plan of action is faulty, execution invariably becomes unsuccessful with disappointing results. Daura and Joel (2021) pointed this to be the most critical limiting factor of development programme initiative of Nigerian government. First, the N-Power programme could not kick off in most states as scheduled to online technical issues with applications and registrations.

#### **(ii) Poor Funding of the Programme**

Abin (2018) revealed that some of the problems faced by the programme included unpaid and late payment of stipends to volunteers. Olurunsola (2022) affirms that the programme is bedeviled with incessant delays in payment of the 30,000 Naira monthly stipends attributed to diversion of funds meant for the programme. Nwaobi (2022) aver that there are reports from various states of the federation of participants of both the 2016 and 2017 batches who are still being owed several months stipends till date. Whilst those paid were made to wait miserably for months, further increasing the frustrations of youths poor livelihood in the country.

#### **(iii) Politicization of the Programme and Lack of Accountability**

Scholars argue that the administration of the N-Power youth empowerment programme have been inhibited by corruption, bribery and overbearing hands of politicians in the programme. Dauda et al., (2019) aver that the unscrupulous circumstances of public accountability in Nigeria have rendered the programme an avenue for Statism, political patronage and settlement of party stalwarts. They further noted that those endorsed for the programme were not properly vetted as it turned out to be a game of favouritism and nepotism with inclusion ghost-participants on the N-Power payroll.

#### **(iv) Inadequate Monitoring and Effective Evaluation**

Monitoring and evaluation activities that should have been conducted on a regular cycle to ensure the smooth delivery of the N-Power youth empowerment programme has been absolutely lacking. Olunrunisola (2022) notes that no officials or monitoring teams specifically set-up and mandated to monitor the participants across the various states, so as to ensure they actually were able to save and kick-start entrepreneurial ventures through the 30,000 naira monthly stipends paid across 2-4 years for batch B and A respectively.

#### **Effect of N-power programme on the Socio-economic Livelihoods of the Nigerian Youths**

In making the social and economic impacts of Nigerian graduate stable and healthy, N-power programme came on board to address such public issues of concern through the adoption and implementation of desired goals and objectives. Abbas (2013) thus observes that, since poverty generally permeates social, economic and political activities of every society, the phenomenon remains a concern that must be checked and addressed by all critical stakeholders. This will mean, identifying and developing an effective policy framework within international, national, and local resources for the benefit of all citizens, especially the poor.

The N-power programme of President Muhammad Buhari has greatly impacted on the social and economic livelihoods of Nigerian youths (Lai, 2018). In buttressing this, evidenced from N-Power Programme (2016) confirmed that no fewer than 6.8 million Nigerians out of the projected 10 million have benefited from N-Power, among other National Social Investment Programme of the Buhari Government. As noted in the write up of Jude (2017), the figure represents nearly 70 per cent success rate in the implementation of the programme. He added that besides the 6.8 million direct beneficiaries, 1.75 million persons comprising cooks, farmers, poor and vulnerable household members, have also been impacted as secondary beneficiaries of the programme. He noted that all the 36 states of the federation and the FCT are participating actively in at least one aspect of the programme. Adetayo (2017) reported that 200,000 and 300,000 N-power beneficiaries were respectively recruited nationwide in 2016 and 2017, known as Batch A and B. The unemployed graduates cum volunteers, were engaged and paid N30,000 as monthly stipends and equipped with electronic devices that prepared them with new skills and ideas beyond the duration of the programme. Although, not all the beneficiaries were equipped with the electronic devices. While majority of the Batch A category had the privilege to receive the electronic devices, the Batch B volunteers were not even though, the selection of devices was included in the process of registration.

Adetayo (2017) notes that the volunteers are being engaged for N-Agro, the agricultural component of the scheme, N-Tax, designed to support the Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS), N-Health and the N-Teach. He adds that N-Build can boast of 10,000 artisans who were verified, supplied with toolboxes for three months training and assigned to 160 skills centres in 22 states. Adetayo (2017) concludes that no fewer than 20,000 persons had been considered for taking part in hardware, creativity and software category training. In addition, the cost-benefit analysis of the programme indicates that a careful implementation of the programmes would deliver a positive return to the country's GDP both in the short and long terms. This N-Power job creation initiative—if executed properly—will be one of the best things this present administration will have put in place. Jude (2017) affirms that the newly launched jobs portal of the Federal Government “npower.gov.ng,” has recorded over 400,000 successful registrations since it opened for submissions at on Sunday, June 12, 2016.

He commends the efforts of the government as well as the social media for the tremendous power of

accountability and the successful registration of registrants. Affirming the extent to which N-power has impacted on the lives of beneficiaries, Jude (2017) points out that some beneficiaries who had no job before their selection and those with meagre salaries from their previous engagements, glorified the programme for positively impacting on their socioeconomic livelihoods. He also agrees that the programme has greatly affected their lifestyles and changed their status. The survey conducted by Jude (2017) corroborates with the statement stated above by highlighting how N-power programme has economic and social benefits to individuals and society at large. He opines that with N30000 as monthly stipends, the scheme at least empowers beneficiaries to meet basic needs.

### **Empirical Review**

Olorunsola (2022) carried out a study titled “An Evaluation of Impact of N-Power programme among youth in Nigeria: This study broadly evaluated the impact of N-Power programme amongst in Nigeria; while it specifically sought to determine the influence of N-Power programme on youth productivity and empowerment amongst programme on youth productivity and empowerment amongst youth in Nigeria. The study adopted descriptive research design of the survey type which permitted the use of inductive approach. The population consisted of all youth in Nigeria and the sample for this study was 400 youths selected through multi-sampling procedure. The study made use of a research instrument tagged “Impact of N-Power Programme Amongst Youth questionnaire (INPSAY)”. Data generated were analyzed using descriptive statistics and the result showed that there is no significant influence of N-Power programme on youth in Nigeria. Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that N-Power programme has been viewed in this study as not a sufficient veritable antidote to the problem of productivity among Nigerian youths. It was recommended amongst others that the Federal Government should ensure prompt and timely payment of the stipends to beneficiaries of the programme. This study however lacked any dependant variable for the impact evaluation, which this study identified as a gap.

Nwaobi (2022) researched on “The Impact of N-Power (Training and Empowerment) Program on the Duration of Youth Unemployment in Nigeria”. The main objective of the project was to evaluate the impact of an empowerment training program such as N-Power through a field experiment in Nigeria. The study adopted the experimental research design which specifically focused on four(4) areas of interest: employment, earnings, job quality and welfare. Using detailed administrative records for program participants, follow-up surveys and field experiments; the researcher set out to construct a panel data model that would allow the study establish the effects of the N-Power programme (in the short run, medium term and long run) on the Nigerian economy. The study provided an in-depth review of existing secondary data and also furnished proper details on its primary data collection plan (on 3 groups of variables viz: individual and household baseline, main outcome variable and institutional variable) but the primary data outcome were published, devoid of any recommendations as well.

Dauda, Adeyeye, Yakubu, Oni and Umar (2019) conducted a study on “The Impact of N-Power Programme on Youth Empowerment in Minna Metropolis, Niger State”. The study had as its objective to ascertain the influence of N-Power scheme on poverty alleviation. A cross sectional survey design was used in the study to generate data. Sample of 225 respondent youths were determined from 512 total populations of N-Power beneficiaries in the Minna metropolis based on structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistics of mean and percentages were used to measure the demographic data while Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Co-efficient ( $r$ ) was employed to test the hypotheses. The study focused on the graduate unemployment category of N-Power Agro, N-Power Health and N-Power Teach.

The results of the study indicated that there is a no significant relationship between the N-Power schemes on poverty alleviation. The study found that the major factors that are militating against the effectiveness of the N-Power programme include: job insecurity, non-payment of stipend to participants as at when due, bribery and corruption, poor monitoring. The study recommended that the authorities concerned should expand the horizon of the programme to cover more unemployed graduates and turn the programme to tenure employment opportunities for the beneficiaries.

Odey and Sambe (2019) carried out an “Assessment of the Contribution of N-Power Programme to Youth Empowerment in Cross River State, Nigeria. The study broadly assessed the contribution of N-Power Programme to youth empowerment in Cross River State, Nigeria; while it specifically identified challenges facing the programme in ensuring empowerment of youth in the study area. The study adopted cross sectional survey design while cluster random sampling was used to select beneficiaries. Questionnaires were use to collect data as Key Information Interview was also use to compliment Questionnaire with percentages used for analysis of data. The study found that N-Power contributed to empowerment of youth through poverty reduction, proficiency skills in ICT, financial empower, on the job experience and investment in small scale business. However, there were challenges faced by the programme in empower of youth which included delay in payment of allowance, unpaid, allowances, distance to working places and teacher training for most of N-Teach beneficiaries. They study recommended amongst others for prompt and timely payment of stipends to beneficiaries by Federal government. This study however focused only on Cross River State which poses a limitation for generalization.

Abunna (2018) carried out “A Critical Study of N-Power Programme Implementation Process in Akwanga Metropolis of Nasarawa State”. The objective of the study was to examine the impact of N-Power Programme on socio-economic lives of beneficiaries in Akwanga Metropolis of Nasarawa State. Based on the descriptive survey design, a sample of 120 N-Power beneficiaries were assessed using questionnaire, while data were analyzed with descriptive statistics. The study revealed that the programme improved socio-economic lives of the beneficiaries by contributing immensely to their financial, materials, social well-being. The study however found that the programme was over centralization in its planning and implementation and recommended for more decentralization in administering such development programmes for the youth. It only focused on beneficiaries in Akwanga Metropolis of Nasaraw State.

Ndukwe (2016) examined “Youth Empowerment Programmes and Unemployment Reduction in Ebonyi State: A Study of the Ministry of Youth and Sports, Abakaliki”. The objectives were to examine the extent to which sponsorship of community based youth clubs has led to discovery and assistance of talented youths; how the entrepreneurial skills acquisition programme had helped in empowering Ebonyi Youths on Metal works; and the extent to which financial support by the Ministry had promoted fashion design among youths. The descriptive survey design was employed with questionnaire administered on a sample size of 443. Jean Jacques Rousseau's Social Contract theory was adopted for the study. Findings revealed that Ebonyi State Ministry of Youth and Sports entrepreneurial skills acquisition and programme had not significantly empowered Ebonyi youths on metal works as well as tailoring/fashion design among youths. The study recommendation amongst others that more efforts should be made by the Ministry to support youths adequately tackle unemployment. This study was relevant to the issue of empowerment/unemployment in Ebonyi State, but wasn't specifically on N-Power.



### **Theoretical Framework**

The structural functionalism theory is adopted for this study. This analytical framework sees the system as a structure existing with some functions (including distributive function) to carry out. It is expected that it will help to ascertain the impact of N-Power Programme in Ibadan North Local Government Area. N-Power is seen as a structure meant to perform some distributive functions targeted at closing the yawning gap of poverty in the State. Functionalism has its roots in the organism (Comte) of early 19th century. Organism of Comte (and later that of Spencer and Durkheim) influenced the functional Anthropologists Malinowski and Redcliffe Brown. Durkheim's timeless analysis and Weber's emphasis on social taxonomies (ideal types) began to shape modern/contemporary structural perspective while Talcott Parsons(1937) developed the Social Systemic Functionalism which identified the structure of social action. These aforementioned scholars are regarded as the great proponents of this theory. Structural Functionalism is a sociological theory that attempts to explain why society functions the way it does by focusing on the relationships among the various social institutions that make up society (e.g., government, law, education, religion, etc.).

This theory sees society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability. It asserts that individuals' lives are guided by social structures, which are relatively stable patterns of social behaviour. Social structures give shape to our lives - for example, in families, the community, and through religious organizations. And certain rituals, such as a handshake or complex religious ceremonies, give structure to our everyday lives. Each social structure has social functions or consequences for the operation of society as a whole. Education, for example, has several important functions in a society, such as socialization, learning. Concerning the area of interest, which is poverty eradication in terms of economic empowerment and the provision of social and personal well-being, the functionalist perspective argues that the issue of unemployment in Nigeria emanates from the apparent imbalances in the country. There is an argument that the pressure on certain people to meet the challenges of satisfying their economic needs tends to push them to certain anti-social behaviours. To mitigate this situation, N-Power Programme becomes the structure through which the state can attempt to bring about cohesion and harmony by distributing resources to the poor (unemployed graduate) to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor.

The theory is applicable to the phenomenon of study by identifying N-Power programme as a structure functional for societal harmony. However, the scheme cannot exist without challenges because some individuals are social deviants who may bring about irregular and negative changes. The challenges may be in the form of corruption, technical issues, favouritism and nepotism, among others. Nevertheless, the programme is likely to have a great impact on the economic and social lives of individuals. The impact can be felt in the skills provided towards making the beneficiaries useful to themselves and society at large. This implies that when an individual is empowered, his household becomes empowered and this will make it possible to provide food for the family and this will help to stabilize the family institution. Again, the stability in the family institution will positively affect other institutions like legal, political, economic, religious, education, health among others. The reason for this is the interconnectedness, interrelatedness and interdependence of the social elements. This will, therefore, help to prevent all sorts of criminality like rape, armed robbery, murder, alcoholism, drug abuse and human trafficking, among others. The strength of the theory in explaining the impacts and the problems affecting the implementation of the N-power programme does not mean that it is free from criticisms.

The theory claims that the scheme is for the vulnerable individuals but the reverse is the case as individuals who are working for instance in two or three different places are still employed under the

scheme. This implies that the programme is not reaching its target. More so, the theory has its weakness for being inadequate in the provision of explanation to the phenomenon under study. It is obvious that the resources earmarked for the programme are embezzled by officials of the scheme. This implies that the purpose of the scheme is defeated and in solving a particular problem, more problems emanate. In other words, the theory cannot holistically solve all human problems.

### **Issues**

Unemployment, poor living standard and GDP are major macro-economic problem confronting Nigeria today, as available reports from various local and international bodies indicate that Nigeria has never experienced youth unemployment in its entire history as severe as it is now (Nwaobi, 2022). From 27.10% in the second quarter of 2020, unemployment rate in Nigeria increased to socioeconomic crippling rate of 32.5% in 2021, and 33.30% in 2022. Statistics indicates that Nigeria's unemployment rate has more than tripled in the last seven years and will only get worse if the government of the country doesn't own up to its social contract delivering enabling environment and support for sustainable employment in Nigeria and this will continuously affect the socio-economic development of the country.

Avalanche of literature cum empirical studies reviewed raised several issues attracting concerns on inhibiting economic development in Nigeria. The Federal office of statistics 2022 report indicates that more than 150 million Nigerians still live in abject poverty earning less than \$1 per day, with about 54% unemployed youth. In fact, to buttress how far behind the country is, Nigeria is not even listed in the top 100 countries with subsistent employment rate and sustainable socio-economic development (World Population Review, 2021). Some researchers were able to identify that the current situation of Nigerian youths is as a result of the failure of the country's leadership to properly effectuate youth empowerment schemes like the N-Power programme to tackle the problem of the youths breeding social alienation and frustration among youths. A 2014 study conducted by the US Institute of Peace cited in Abayomi (2020) revealed that unemployment topped the major reasons why youth join insurgency like Boko-Haram and are predisposed to banditry, criminality and other vices which has greatly affect the socio-economic development of the country.

### **Gaps**

It is worthy of acknowledgement that efforts have been made by few studies to investigate the impact of government youth empowerment programmes in Nigeria. Nonetheless, a study by Abunna (2018) which examined the impact of N-Power Programme on socio-economic poverty lives of beneficiaries only investigated the implementation process on poverty mitigation for youths in Nasarawa State.

A study conducted by Okon and Bassey (2018) also investigated N-Power teachers competence and resource utilization: implication for effective and efficient teaching in Nigerian primary and post primary schools; hence, the study was only focused on N-Teach aspect of the programme and hinged on competence of the beneficiaries in terms of teacher education. Dauda et al., (2019) in their study on “The Impact of N-Power Programme on Youth Empowerment in Minna Metropolis, Niger State” wee able to assess the influence of N-Power scheme on poverty alleviation, but not on employability and entrepreneurship. Nwaobi (2022) researched on “the Impact of N-Power (Training and Empowerment) Programme on the Duration of Youth Unemployment in Nigeria”, but the primary data outcomes were not published. The study by Olorunbsola (2022) “An Evaluation of Impact of N-Power Programme among

Youth in Nigeria” made significant effort in revealing the influence of the programme on productivity among Nigerian youths. Notwithstanding the efforts made by these scholars, none of them to the researchers' knowledge were able to examine in concrete details the effect of N-Power programme on employment growth in Nigeria vis-a-vis the employability and entrepreneurship improvement; hence this study was able to close these identified research gaps.

### **Outcome**

The initiative of N-Power was to train youths on employability skills and boost their resourcefulness by providing them with tools and skills acquisition to enable them advance from joblessness to empowerment/entrepreneurship, so they can be independent and become employers of labour thereby reducing unemployment, contributing to increase living standard and gross domestic product which will boost socio-economic development of this country. It is rather disheartening and very worrisome that the due process, monitoring and evaluation that should have been built into the programme design, as essential programme management tool to keep track of all the process and measure implementation were overlooked. A study by Okon and Bassey (2018) noted that the programme did not provide teacher education to volunteers before deployment in the N-Teach strand. Thus, such volunteers were not empowered to take-up the teaching profession before being deployed. The research conducted by Abunna (2018) revealed that the N-Power programme has not had the much desired impact on youth skills acquisition for poverty mitigation due to over centralization of the programme, which has the tendency to affect interaction between beneficiaries and authorities who control the programme and limit possibility of improving the scheme through understanding of the beneficiaries plight. Olorunsola (2022) investigation found that even from the candidates' short listing phase, the participants were not properly screened to ensure they had the requisite qualification and entrepreneurial skills what would enable them utilize the opportunity to become productive and resourceful afterwards. Moreover, the programme was meant to recruit participants and assign them to primary places of assignment of closest proximity to their places of abode. But the anomalies in the planning and execution processes paired participants to locations where they had to spend between N100 to N300 daily as transportation fare, which left them with no practically no savings at the end of the programme to start up any meaningful endeavour, thereby defeating the programme objective of transforming fresh graduates to become entrepreneurs of their own micro-small enterprises and increasing socio-economic development of the country.

It is no longer news that the 2016 Batch A and 2017 Batch B and 2022 Batch C volunteers have been laid off. However, it was predesigned that these beneficiaries of the N-Power Graduate category who had concluded the two-year job programme will be transitioned to permanent job opportunities or providing funds in starting, building and maintain their own successful business to the extent that it creates other jobs for people and further contributes to the economy. But since 2019, it was purported that plans had been concluded for the transition of the beneficiaries through the creation of the NEXIT portal, which would allow those who choose to sign up to access jobs or business loans. Even though most exited N-Power beneficiaries has already concluded their data upload on the N-exit portal since 2020, nothing concrete has been done.

## **Conclusion**

Skills and knowledge are the driving forces of economic growth and social development. Despite the current high level of youth unemployment and other social problems, affecting Nigerian socio-economic development, different regimes of Nigerian governments have demonstrated the import of the youth to national development through empowerment programmes. Large-scale skill development is the main policy thrust of the N-Power Programme. N-Power is a Federal Government's policy in the economic, employment and social development arenas established to address 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 programme is an inclusive one which gives opportunities to both men and women. It is also not limited to the educated elites, by absorbing even the non literates for the growth of Nigerians and the Nigerian economy. It has to some extent, impacted on the socioeconomic lives of the beneficiaries in the study area, by providing a great significant number of them adequate skills and training.

It provides various forms of assistance apart from loans which need to be reviewed. The beneficiaries, to a very large extent, were not satisfied with the monthly stipends given probably due to the expenses incurred for transport and other responsibilities. While the youths get empowered through the programme, they are likely to establish business escapable of generating employment for others, thereby, decreasing the rate of unemployment and other social problems in the study area. With this said, the impact can also be extended to Nigeria, through growth in GDP, economic boost, provision of food security, which may ultimately result in developing the country as well.

## **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are hereby put forward;

- i. The programme should be sustained and continued by the successive government in order to take a number of youths out of poverty.
- ii. well trained computer experts, working with other relevant stakeholders, should be employed to avert the problem of payments delay to beneficiaries.
- iii. new minimum wage reflects in the stipends given to the beneficiaries in order to successfully carry out their duties with commitment and diligence.
- iv. more efforts should be intensified by the officials of the programme to maintain transparency and corruption-free of the programme and should not be used to settle political party thugs and hirelings.
- v. government and all relevant stakeholders should ensure proper funding of not only N-power project but also all other poverty alleviation programmes especially in the area of human development to liberate the masses from servitude.
- vi. young Nigerians should be trained to possess skills that are congruent with the real labour market demands which will be very much useful after being permanently disengaged from the programme.
- vii. beneficiaries should be contented with the token paid as stipends and try to invest by rearing animals, starting petty businesses, among others. They should not see the programme as right, entitlement but privilege given to improve personal skills and contribute their quota to the development of the Nigeria economy..

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