

# **AN APPRAISAL OF N-POWER PROGRAMME AND POVERTY REDUCTION IN NIGERIA**

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## **Abstract**

Despite several efforts at reducing poverty in Nigeria, reports indicate that about 90.8 million Nigerians, representing 46.4% of its estimated 195.6 million people are living in extreme poverty, making Nigeria a country with the highest number of life-threatening poor people in the world. In attempts to correct this narrative, the National Social Investments Programme (N-SIP) was launched by the Nigerian Federal Government as a strategy for combating poverty and unemployment in the country. The N-SIP programme consists of four components which involve: Job Creation and Youth Empowerment (N- Power); National Home Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP); National Cash Transfer Programme (NCTP); and Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP). In an attempt to appraise the performance of N-Power and how this programme has achieved poverty reduction in Nigeria, this paper reviewed secondary sources of data focused at expounding personal, interpersonal and environmental resources made available by N-Power to Nigerians which empower and motivate Nigerian youth to perform valid social roles and activities aimed at improving their living conditions. Analyses in the paper hinge on the Empowerment Theory. Major findings established that uncertainties in policy direction of the Nigerian Federal Government negatively impact on the efficiency of the N-Power's participants and volunteers, as they believe that their job with the government is not secured. The paper recommends that N-Power participants and volunteers should be carried along in the formulation and implementation of policies, programmes and projects aimed at reducing poverty through the provision of skills acquisition training for unemployed Nigerian youths.

**Keywords:** Skills, Beneficiary, N-Power, Poverty, Poverty reduction, Unemployment

## Introduction

Poverty has emerged as one of the challenges of the 21st century (Gweshengwe & Hassan, 2020). About 1.3 billion people (22%) across 107 developing countries live in poverty with children under age 18 constituting half of the poor. Out of this, about 84.3% of the poor people live in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia with the majority left behind in terms of access to basic needs such as nutrition, standard housing, and quality education (UNDP & OPHDI, 2020). Widespread poverty in Africa can be attributed to population explosion, climate shocks, ill-health, conflict and displacement of people (Watkins & Quattri, 2019). The World Economic Forum recently reported that Nigeria has overtaken India as the country with the highest number of extremely poor people in the world (Schwab, 2019). About 100 million Nigerians (62.6 percent of the population) live below the international poverty line (PPP US\$1.25 per day). Unemployment also doubled from 6.4 percent in 2014 to 14.2 percent in 2017 (FGN, 2017). There was also high rate of inequality not just with respect to income but also in terms of access to basic social services and opportunities. The high level of poverty in Nigeria has been orchestrated by low Gross Domestic Product (GDP), poor performance of the social sector, high level of insecurity (Boko Haram insurgency, Herdsmen attack) and high rate of unemployment, among others (Watkins & Quattri, 2019). As a means of addressing the widespread poverty, the Buhari administration instituted the National Social Investment Programme in 2016 (Abin, 2018).

The high and increasing poverty incidence in Nigeria has made poverty alleviation programmes and strategies a major focus in policy formulation by different governments (Abin, 2018). Poverty alleviation strategies are usually measures put in place by government with the sole aim of raising the welfare or well-being of the poor (Umo, 2012). It aimed at enabling the poor to create wealth. Since the Mid-1980s when the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) was adopted in managing the economy, poverty alleviation programmes (PAPs) have multiplied. As at 2014, over 30 different PAPs have been experimented with. This number does not include the several initiatives at the state and local government levels (Abin, 2018). In Nigeria, government had purposively designed series of social investment programmes in the time past with a view to solving the incessant problems of poverty, unemployment and inequality. In some point in times, it is categorically geared towards reducing the rate of youth restiveness in volatile areas and states of the federation. The Administration of President Muhammadu Buhari “designed and implemented the current National Social Investments Programme (N-SIP) as strategy for combating poverty and unemployment (Abin, 2018). The N-SIP scheme was created to enable

citizen's exit from the twin evils of poverty and unemployment through capacity building, investment and direct financial support (Abin, 2018). The programme consists of four major components include the Job Creation and Youth Empowerment (N- Power), National Home Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP), National Cash Transfer Programme (NCTP) and Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP) (Abin, 2018). NSIP generally aimed at increasing the poor and vulnerable household with income/livelihood by providing access to targeted funds, thereby improving household ability to absorb economic shock (Abin, 2018).

N-Power is a scheme under the National Social Investments Programme of the Nigerian Federal Government geared towards graduate's job creation; poverty alleviation and empowerment initiatives through volunteering services. N-power is a National Social Investment Programme of the Federal Government aimed specifically at job creation and youth empowerment through human capital development (Abin, 2018). The human capital boost appears to be in area of youth employment which was intended to be addressed through youth empowerment. Youth empowerment was to be ensured through skill acquisition and development of youth in critical sectors such as education, health and agriculture (Abin, 2018). The programme is available for graduate and non-graduates. It is aimed at inculcating in Nigerian youths the learn-work entrepreneurship culture between the ages of 18-35 (FGN 2018). According to Kabeer (2018), the goals of the programme include; reducing the rate of unemployment in the country, facilitating the transfer of entrepreneurial, technical skills and employability ability and bringing solution to active public service and government diversification policy. In essence, one of the objectives of the programme was to boost the human capital of the Nigerian labour force (N-Power Information Guide, 2017)

The N-Power programme is envisaged to address a range of social problems such as curbing the incidence of poverty, teeming youth unemployment, entrepreneurship orientation and increasing school enrolment (Akujuru, 2019). The N-power initiative which is the job creation component of the policy aims at reducing poverty and unemployment and is targeted at the Nigerian youths (Abin, 2018). However, creating a policy and its implementation to achieve set goals appear to be mutually exclusive in the Nigerian context. Efforts by successive governments to combat the excruciating poverty and monumental unemployment as well as other initiatives geared toward alleviating the precarious situation surrounding the Nigerian youths and to enhance the quality of life had ended in fiasco, as a consequence of abysmal and porous implementation of the said programmes (Abin, 2018). The N-power initiative, which is the job creation component

of the policy aims at reducing poverty and unemployment and is targeted at the Nigerian youths. However, creating a policy and its implementation to achieve set goals appear to be mutually exclusive in the Nigerian context (Abin, 2018). Despite the various policy formulated by the government over the years to address youth unemployment and poverty reduction, issue of rising poverty incidence in Nigeria is a challenge before policy makers and researchers at both national and international levels. Policy measures were adopted by various administrations with the aim of reducing the poverty level. Most of the policies were either wrongly designed or had problem in the cause of implementation. Evidence has shown that despite the programmes and policies put in place, poverty incidence keep on increasing over the years. It is against this background that the researcher intends to assess the impact of N-power scheme and poverty reduction in Nigeria (Abin, 2018).

### **Origins and Dynamics of the N-Power Programme in Nigeria**

Over the years, government has reacted strongly to the rising poverty trends in the country. Okoro and Bassey (2018) stated that several poverty reduction approaches have been formulated and implemented all with the objective or attempts geared towards arresting the beleaguered poverty situation in the country. From 1999 till date, some of the poverty reduction measures include the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), SURE- P, N-SIP (Abin, 2018). Despite the litanies of programmes on poverty reduction in Nigeria, it has been observed that the incidence of poverty in Nigeria is exacerbating rather than ameliorating (Ugoh, 2010). The World Bank group in June 2016 granted the sum of \$.5 billion International Development Association credit to assist in the establishment of programmes aimed at economic development in Nigeria (NBS, 2018). The Federal Government of Nigeria sourced an additional \$1.3 billion from its budget to create the social safety net programmes which came to be known as the National Social Investment Programme (NSIP). Since then, more than 4 million people have benefited directly from financial assistance, job training and social intervention scheme of these programmes (NBS, 2018). The Administration of President Muhammadu Buhari “designed and implemented the current National Social Investments Programme (N-SIP) as strategy for combating poverty and unemployment (Abin, 2018). The N-SIP scheme was created to enable citizen’s exit from the twin evils of poverty and unemployment through capacity building, investment and direct financial support (Abin, 2018). The programme consists of four major components include the Job Creation and Youth Empowerment (N- Power), National Home Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP), National Cash Transfer Programme (NCTP) and Government Enterprise and

Empowerment Programme (GEEP). NSIP generally aimed at increasing the poor and vulnerable household with income/livelihood by providing access to targeted funds, thereby improving household ability to absorb economic shock (Abin, 2018).

N-Power is a scheme under the National Social Investments Programme of the Nigerian Federal Government geared towards graduate's job creation; poverty alleviation and empowerment initiatives through volunteering services. The programme is available for graduate and non-graduates. It is aimed at inculcating in Nigerian youths the learn-work entrepreneurship culture between the ages of 18-35 (FGN 2018). For the purposes of N-Power, Graduate means any post-tertiary qualification including an Ordinary National Diploma (OND) or Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE) or as may be specified by the programme (Obadan, 2020). The key N-Power Programmes include: N-Power Agro, N-Power Tax, N-Power Build, N-Power Creative, N-Power Health, N-Power Teach, N-Power Tech Hardware and N-Power Tech Software (FGN 2018).

The N-Power Volunteer Corps is the post-tertiary engagement initiative for Nigerians between 18 and 35. It is a paid volunteering programme of 2-year duration (FGN 2018). The graduates will undertake their primary tasks in identified public services within their proximate communities (Obadan, 2020). All N-Power Volunteers are entitled to computing devices that will contain information necessary for their specific engagement, as well as information for their continuous training and development. In 2016, the Federal Government engaged 200,000 N-Power Volunteers (Obadan, 2020). In 2017, the Federal Government enlisted 300,000 volunteers more (Bennel, 2017; Obadan, 2020). Despite the current high level of unemployment, harnessing Nigeria's young demography through appropriate skill development efforts provides an opportunity to achieve inclusion and productivity within the country (NBS, 2018). Large-scale skill development is the main policy thrust of the N-Power Programme (FGN 2018). N-Power is also linked to the Federal Government's policies in the economic, empowerment and social development arenas. N-Power addresses the challenge of youth unemployment by providing a structure for large scale and relevant work skills acquisition and development while linking its core and outcomes to fixing inadequate public services and stimulating the larger economy. The modular programmes under N-Power will ensure that each participant will learn and practice most of what is necessary to find or create work (FGN 2018). N-Power is also a platform for diversifying the economy. N-Power is preparing young Nigerians for a knowledge economy where, equipped with world-class skills and certification, they become innovators and movers in the domestic and global markets. Nigeria will have a pool of software developers, hardware service professionals, animators, graphic

artists, building services, Professionals, artisans and others (FGN 2018). N-Power also focuses on providing our non-graduates with relevant technical and business skills that enhance their work outlook and livelihood (FGN 2018).

By deploying a force of 500,000 trained graduated in their communities, the N-Power Programme is a community-sourced solution to the nation's under-developed public services like education, healthcare, and civic engagement (N-Power, 2017). The Programme is built to prepare young Nigerians for a modern, globalized economy by helping equip youths with skills and certifications for emerging global markets (N-Power, 2017). Nigeria is looking to increase its already bustling technology sector by supporting a talent pool of software developers, hardware professionals, and other tech based skills such as animators and digital artists. The programme is divided into the following categories;

- i. Graduate Category which comprised of N-Power Volunteer Corps
- ii. Non-Graduate Category comprising of N-Power Knowledge and N-Power Build (N-Power, 2017).

The graduate's category is further divided into three areas namely, the N-Teach, N-Health and N-Agro (N-Power, 2017). For the non-graduates category, N-Build Scheme is geared towards equipping its beneficiaries with necessary and meaningful skills to be self-employed (N-Power, 2017).

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

- i. To intervene and directly improve the livelihood of a critical mass of young unemployed Nigerians;
- ii. To develop a qualitative system for the transfer of employability, entrepreneurial and technical skills;
- iii. To create an ecosystem of solutions for ailing public services and government diversification n policies; and
- iv. To develop and enhance Nigeria's knowledge economy (N-Power, 2017).

#### **Key Areas of N-Power**

According to Kabeer (2018), the goals of the programme include: reducing the rate of unemployment in the country, facilitating the transfer of entrepreneurial, technical skills and employability ability and bringing solution to active public service and government diversification policy. The graduate's category is further divided into three areas namely, the N-Teach, N-Health and N-Agro (N-Power, 2017). For the non-graduates category, N-Build Scheme is geared towards equipping its beneficiaries with necessary and meaningful skills to be self-employed. Based on the forgoing, this paper is limited to the N-Power scheme with a view to assessing its

impact in ameliorating youth unemployment, mitigating the high incidence of poverty and skill acquisition respectively” (N-Power, 2017).

***N-Power Teach:*** This category of beneficiaries is expected to help improve basic education delivery in Nigeria. N-Power Teach Volunteers are deployed as teacher assistants in primary schools that appear to be understaffed in Nigeria. They are not expected to replace the current teachers, but to work as support teachers across the country, assisting with teaching, school management and other functions within the schools (N-Power, 2017). Where possible, they are also required to assist in taking basic education to children in marginalized communities (N-Power Information Guide, 2017). N-Power Teach (STEM) is also a component of the N-Power Teach programme (FGN 2018). Through this programme, young graduates with the skills and interest in computer programming and other related fields are required to assist in the implementation of the Federal Government’s STEM Programme for primary and secondary schools in the country (N-Power Information guide, 2017).

***N-Power Health:*** Under this strand of the programme, N-Power Health beneficiaries are required to assist in improving and promoting preventive healthcare in their communities to vulnerable members of the society including pregnant women and children and to families and individuals (FGN 2018). This area is reserved for those who read health and medical related courses at certificate course and diploma levels (N-Power Information Guide, 2017).

***N-Power Agro:*** N-Power Agro beneficiaries are intended to provide advisory services to farmers across the country (FGN 2018). They are expected to disseminate the knowledge that has been amassed by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development in the area of extension services. They are also required to gather data of Nigeria’s agriculture assets. This area is meant for youth who were educated in agricultural related courses (N-Power Information Guide, 2017).

***N-Build:*** Also, the fourth component of the NSIP is N-Power Build with civil divisions in the area of building services, construction, environment services, utilities, automotive, as well as aluminum and gas (FGN 2018). N-Power Build engages and trains young unemployed Nigerians so as to build a new crop of skilled and highly competent workforce of technicians, artisans and service professionals to enhance the entrepreneurship skills of the beneficiaries (FGN 2018).

### **Conceptualizing Poverty and Poverty Reduction**

Poverty has been defined differently by various scholars based on their perspectives. Thus, there is no universally accepted definition of poverty. However, according to World Bank Report (2010), poverty is the inability to attain a minimum standard of living. The report constructed some indices based on a minimum level of consumption in order to show the practical aspect of poverty. These include lack of access to resources, lack of education and skills, poor health, malnutrition, lack of political freedom and voice, lack of shelter, poor access to water and sanitation, vulnerability to shocks, violence and crime, political discrimination and marginalization (World Bank Report, 2010). In the words of Akinmulegun (2014) poverty may be defined as the economic condition of lacking predictable and stable means of meeting basic life needs. In same vein, Kpelai (2013) asserted that poverty is a state where an individual is not able to cater adequately for his or her basic needs of food, clothing and shelter. It is a situation whereby an individual is unable to meet his/her social and economic obligations, lack gainful employment, skills, assets and self-esteem, and has limited access to social and economic infrastructure such as education, health, portable water and sanitation and consequently has limited chance of advancing his or her welfare to the limit of his or her capabilities (Kpelai, 2013).

Poverty can also be seen in absolute and relative terms (Akinmulegun, 2014). Insufficient resource base, lack of income, narrow margin, high risk of failure, hunger, disease, malnutrition and the like all characterized absolute poverty (Akinmulegun, 2014). While relative poverty defines poverty from a comparative point of view, that is, relative poverty manifests in irrelevant comparison of one's material position with others, mostly age groups and peer and experiencing deviational outcomes from expectations (Akinmulegun, 2014). From the foregoing, even though no universal definition of poverty exists, the bottom line of the views of scholars indicate that poverty depict a situation whereby an individual lack the capacity to meet his or her basic materials needs like food, clothing, shelter, potable water, education, basic healthcare and other necessities required for improved living conditions. Poverty reduction simply refers to all formal activities geared towards lowering the prevalence and rate of poverty in the country (Akinmulegun, 2014). In other words, it is a process by which deliberate actions are taken in order to ensure that people who are unable to meet up with the basic necessities of life are supported and assisted to achieve same (Lawal & Hassan, 2012; Kpelai, 2013). However, Lawal and Hassan (2012) added that opinions are divided among scholars on the possibility of eradication of poverty. While the protagonists argue that with equitable distribution of resources, poverty can be eradicated in human society, the antagonists insist that poverty is a steady social problem in every

human society and cannot be eradicated. Rather, they are of the position that it can only be minimized by a way of reducing its impacts and the percentage of the population affected (Akinmulegun, 2014). In the light of the above, poverty is a phenomenon that cut across all societies. It cannot be totally eradicated but it can be reduced to a barest minimum (Akinmulegun, 2014).

Unemployment is generally regarded as a situation where people who are willing, able, and ready to work do not have job. Nwagu (2014) defines the unemployed as members of the economically active population who are without work but available for and seeking work, including people who have lost their jobs or who have voluntarily left work. This definition only takes into consideration persons who are without paid jobs to earn a decent living. The ILO (2019) conceptualized unemployment as a situation where persons of working age (usually persons aged 15 to 64 years) who were not in employment, seek employment during a specified period and are available to take up employment if given a job opportunity but could not find employment (ILO, 2019). This paper draws heavily on this definition because it is more specific. National Social Investment Programmes (NSIP) is a mix of policies and programmes designed for individuals and households throughout the life cycle to prevent and reduce poverty and socioeconomic shocks by promoting and enhancing livelihoods and a life of dignity (The Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2016).

A search through the literature indicates that the current National Social Investment Programmes (NSIP) being implemented in Nigeria today is tied to the World Bank social protection and job creation programmes which consist of three core objectives: resilience, equity, and opportunity (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2020). They are designed to help poor individuals and households cushion the negative shocks and to ensure that they can meet their basic needs (World Bank, 2019). Finally, the opportunity objective consists of active labour market programmes that provide better income-earning opportunities by upgrading worker skills or facilitating mobility as well as labour policies and regulations that protect workers (World Bank, 2019). In summary, social protection programmes seek to provide households with the income support to fight poverty and invest in the human capital of their members (World Bank, 2019).

### **Levels of Poverty in Nigeria**

In Nigeria, though there has been a steady growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) since the country came out of recession in 2017, people are becoming poorer and inequality continues to increase (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2020). Besides, most of the workforce is in the informal sector where there is little income and job security. Hence, the likelihood of transiting out of poverty is low (FGN, 2020). Recent reports further indicate

that 40% of Nigerians (i.e., 83 million people) live below the poverty line while another 25% (53 million) are vulnerable (World Bank Nigeria, 2020). Inequality in income and job opportunities remains high and has undermined poverty reduction. Similarly, lack of job opportunities can be linked to widespread social and political unrest which has been exacerbated by the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the World Bank (2020), the global recession occasioned by the pandemic has pushed about 2 million Nigerians into poverty. Data on the unemployment rate in Nigeria indicates that it increased in 2018 compared to previous years. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2020), the national unemployment rate rose from 23% in the third quarter (Q3) of 2018 to 27% while underemployment rate increased from 20% to 28.6%. A combination of unemployment and the underemployment rate in Nigeria for the reference period gives a total of 55.7%. This means that 27.1% of the labour force in Nigeria or 21,764,617 persons either did nothing or worked for less than 20 hours a week, making them unemployed (NBS, 2020). When people live in extreme poverty and/or are unemployed, they suffer dire consequences due to social exclusion (World Bank, 2019).

### **Poverty Reduction Strategies in Nigeria**

In Nigeria, the poverty alleviation measures implemented so far have focused more on growth, basic needs and rural development approaches (World Bank, 2019). At the inception of the current democratic government, many Nigerians were meant to believe that poverty alleviation is the ultimate goal of the present government. The Government embarked on Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP), which aimed at job creation. With the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in 1986, Poverty Alleviation Programmes (PAPs) have multiplied. As at 2012, more than 30 different PAPs have been experimented (Umo 2012). This number does not include other initiatives at the state and local Governments levels. Some of the poverty alleviation schemes in Nigeria include:

***The National Directorate of Employment (NDE):*** The NDE by its mandate was to design and implement programmes to combat mass unemployment and articulate policies aimed at developing work programmes with labour intensive potentials. The administration of General Babangida then saw unemployment as one of the key issues challenging the agenda of government since it posed a potential danger to the socio-political and economic system of the nation. The administration view unemployment as the major factor behind mass poverty, the federal Government established NDE in 1986 to generate employment particularly to the teeming youth. It has four core programmes under it; a) Vocational skills development programme(VSDP) which includes sub-programmes such as the national

open apprenticeship scheme (NOAS), school on wheels (SOW) programme and waste to wealth (WTW) programme; b) Small Scale Enterprises (SSE) programme; c) Rural Employment Promotion; d) Special Public Works Programme

***The Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP):*** The PAP as a poverty reduction programme was introduced in 2000 with the sole aim of addressing the problems of rising unemployment and crime rates especially among the youth. The Primary objectives of PAP were: i) to reduce the problem of unemployment and hence raise effective demand in the economy; ii) Increases the productiveness of the economy; iii) Drastically reduce the embarrassing crime wave in the society.

***National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP):*** NAPEP was introduced in 2001 with the aim of addressing the most pressing manifestations of absolute poverty, and to eradicate it in the shortest possible time. NAPEP is a central coordination point for all anti-poverty efforts from the local government level to the national level. With a takeoff grant of N6billion, NAPEP established structures at all levels nationwide. It was complemented by the National Poverty Eradication Council (NAPEC) charged with the responsibility of coordinating all poverty eradicating programmes of all government agencies and parastatals and the ministries with the aim of ensuring the central planning and coordination of all poverty reduction programmes in the country.

***NEEDS 1 and 2:*** The NEEDS is a homegrown poverty reduction strategy launched in May 2003. It focuses on four key objectives: poverty reduction, wealth creation, employment generation and value reorientation. It aimed at restructuring the government to make it smaller, stronger, better, skilled and more efficient at delivering essential services. It is expected to be complimented with the SEEDS, LEEDS and FEEDS at the states, local Governments and Federal Capital Territory levels respectively. In 2008, the country embarked on the production of NEEDS 2 which was to cover 2008 to 2011 with a central focus on reducing poverty by 30% by 2011. It was designed as a continuation of the Vision, mission and strategies of NEEDS 1. The overarching goals were the same: poverty reduction, employment generation, wealth creation and value reorientation. The economic performance under NEEDS showed a mixed result. While there was improvement in real GDP growth rate, gross national savings and crude oil production, other areas such as infrastructure, power generation, unemployment, inequality worsened.

***The Seven-Point Agenda (7-PA):*** The Seven point agenda was an initiative of the late president Yar Adua. The 7-PA (2007-2010) articulated the policy priorities that would strengthen the existing reforms and build the economy. The agenda aimed to achieve double digit growth rates and make Nigeria

one of the 20 largest economies in the world by the year 2020 through focusing on seven priorities; which include:

- i. *Power and Energy*: The infrastructural reform in this critical sector was to develop sufficient and adequate power supply that will ensure Nigeria's ability to develop as a modern economy and an industrial nation by the year 2015.
- ii. *Food Security and Agriculture*: This reform is primarily agrarian based. The emphasis was on the development of modern technology, research, financial injection into research, production and development of agricultural inputs that will revolutionize the agricultural sector leading to a 5-10 fold increase in yield and production. This will result in massive domestic and commercial outputs and technological knowledge transfer to farmers.
- iii. *Wealth Creation and Employment*: By virtue of its relevance on revenue from non-renewal oil, a resource that does not renew itself. To diversify the economy and enhance the revenue base, therefore increase employment opportunities for Nigerians and develop human capacity.
- iv. *Transport Sector*: To develop an efficient transport system for goods and people. With a goal of a modernized industrialized Nigeria, it is mandatory that Nigeria develops its transport sector.
- v. *Land Reforms*: To amend the existing land law, to allow access for large private businesses and commercialized farming to boost the economy. The planned result is to ensure improvement and boosts to the production and wealth creation initiatives.
- vi. *Security*: To enhance nationwide security especially in Niger Delta region in order to allow for internal and foreign investment and safeguard of life and properties.
- vii. *Education*: To improve human resources capacity building, upgrading of facilities in the federal educational institutions and reforms to improve quality of and access to education.

The seven point agenda seem not to have made any meaningful impact on the resolution of the Nigeria's developmental challenges (Abin, 2018). Some of the reasons for the low impact or total failure of these structures includes; - Poor coordination of activities and absence of effective continuous policy formulation, lack of sustainability of programme and projects - Absence of achievable target setting, lack of impact assessment or monitoring and evaluation, absence of effective coordination collaboration and complementation between the agencies and among the tiers of government, duplication of functions with a resulting unnecessary rivalry among institutions.

### **The Vision 20:20**

The Nigerian Government launched an Economic Transformation Blueprint in 2009 tagged Vision 20:20. It is a long term plan aimed at stimulating Nigeria's economic growth and launching the country into a path of sustained and rapid socio-economic development. The Vision is that by 20:20 Nigeria will have a large, strong, diversified, sustained and competitive economy that is one of the top 20 economies in the world. The three strategic pillars around which a number of strategic objectives have been developed are; guaranteeing productivity of the people and their well-being, ensuring that the key sources of economic growth are optimized and sustainable social and economic development (Abin, 2018).

***Transformation Agenda:*** The Transformation Agenda 2011-2015 draws its inspiration from the vision 20:20. Over the four year period, the first national implementation plan (NIP) aims to deepen the effects and provide a sense of direction for the administration. The Programme is targeted at the followings: - Job Creation - Public Expenditure management - Foreign Policy and Economic Diplomacy - Human capital Development policies, programmes and projects - Infrastructure policies - Enables for sustainable Growth and Development (Abin, 2018).

***Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P):*** This programme is a 3-4 year programme and a subset of the transformation Agenda. It is designed to mitigate the immediate impact of the removal of fuel subsidy and accelerate economic growth through investments in critically needed infrastructure. Projects in works, power, agriculture and rural development, Education, Health, Aviation, FCT administration, Niger-Delta and water resources were given priority (Adetayo, 2017). Through public works, youth and women employment component of the SURE-P, the Federal government of Nigeria established the Graduate Internship Scheme (GIS) which aims to provide the unemployed graduate youths with job apprenticeship opportunities that will expose them to skills and experiences relevant to the current labour market and enhance their employability. However well intended these programmes were hijacked by the politicians as the philosophy behind the setting up of the programmes were politicized in most cases. For instance, beneficiaries of these programmes are usually party faithful, loyalists and family members instead of genuine members of the society.

***National Social Investment Programme:*** The Administration of President Muhammadu Buhari "designed and implemented the current National Social Investments Programme (N-SIP) as strategy for combating poverty and unemployment. The N-SIP scheme was created to enable citizen's exit from the twin evils of poverty and unemployment through capacity building, investment and direct financial support (Abin, 2018). The programme

consists of four major components include the Job Creation and Youth Empowerment (N- Power), National Home Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP), National Cash Transfer Programme (NCTP) and Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP). NSIP generally aimed at increasing the poor and vulnerable household with income/livelihood by providing access to targeted funds, thereby improving household ability to absorb economic shock (Abin, 2018).

### **Impact of N-Power on the Socio-Economic Status of Beneficiaries in Nigeria**

In making the social and economic impacts of Nigeria youths 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. In buttressing this, evidenced from N-Power Programme (2017) 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. Adetayo (2017) reported that 200,000 and 300,000 N-power beneficiaries were respectively recruited nationwide in 2016 and 2021, known as Batch A, B and C. 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 meager 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.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study adopted the empowerment theory propounded by Barbara Bryant Solomon in 1976. According to this theory, personal, interpersonal and environmental resources are needed to update the skills, knowledge, and motivation of people to achieve valid social roles. It relates that people contribute their quota to the development of any society if they are given the needed conducive environment. This theory as noted by Okala and Ijeoma (2014) sees "the empowerment theory helps to enhance citizen participation." It is in the light of this theory citizens who are lacking could be empowered so that they can play their social roles and render their obligations to the society. The central assumption of this theory is that personal, interpersonal and environmental resources are needed to update the skills, knowledge and motivation of people to achieve valid social roles and activities aimed at improving their living conditions. Therefore, the inability to use these resources and support to achieve collective goals results in powerlessness and sense of hopelessness (Solomon, 1976).

This theory states that people have the right to power, ability, and authority to achieve self-determination. The emphasis here is that empowerment resides with the person that needs the help, and not the helper. This being the case, it is believed that the unemployed youths should be

empowered to take advantage of policies and programmes meant for them to benefit and improve their lives by encouraging and educating them to access and utilize the services of N-Power. In other words, the beneficiary should be encouraged to participate in the formulation and implementation of various programmes of N-Power that are aimed at reducing their poverty level and turning around their lives. According to Aliyu (2012), experiences from the past poverty reduction programmes showed the inability to involve the people in their planning and implementation which probably led to their failure. Yet, one of the main features of N-Power is built to address the issue of youth unemployment and help increase social development which aimed at empowering the Nigeria youths prosperity, give opportunity develop relevant skills. Therefore, by empowering the people especially the poor, the beneficiaries will be lifted out of poverty thereby reducing poverty level in Nigeria in general.

### **Challenges Associated with the Implementation of the N-power Programme in Nigeria**

The implementation of different poverty alleviation programmes is associated with a number of challenges. Therefore, N-Power programme is not without any challenges. However, the fact that the incidence of poverty remains very high, the existence of the various programmes notwithstanding, points to the ineffectiveness of the strategies of the programmes (Bolaji, 2014). A number of factors have contributed to the failure and efforts of past empowerment programmes, N-Power programme inclusive. Bolaji (2014) identified a lack of targeting mechanisms for the poor and the fact that most of the programmes do not focus directly on the poor. He further posited that political and policy instability have resulted in frequent policy changes and inconsistent implementation which in turn have prevented continuous progress in poverty reduction programmes. One of the challenges facing the effectiveness of the job initiative programme is the question of: What next by the beneficiaries. The programme was designed to last for a two-year term when it began in 2016. The engagement of those who were on boarded in 2016 was expected to come to an end on November 2018. But knowing the impact the action could cause; President Muhammadu Buhari said the volunteers would continue to earn their monthly salary of N30, 000. The beneficiaries were directed to keep going to their places of primary assignment, yet they are worried about what's going to happen next. What happens to them if the government announced the end of N-Power? This is one of the challenges faced by N-Power beneficiaries which also restraining their output. Related to the above problem is: Job security. Many N-Power volunteers most especially 2016

batch, wanted their engagement with the federal government made permanent.

N-Power beneficiaries have complained that the stipends remunerated by the Federal Government are not consistent as expected (Lawal and Hassan, 2017). His investigation revealed that many of the beneficiaries were not paid their monthly stipends even though they were duly registered, mobilized for their posts and regularly attended their place of primary assignments (PPAs). Lawal and Hassan (2017) buttresses that several challenges associated with the programme include unmatched names and technical issues based on the complaints got from beneficiaries. This problem was experienced in States like Nasarawa, Kwara, Borno, Lagos, among others. The fact that the N-Power project is a programme for the masses is not distant from challenges in terms of implementation and achieving its aim and objectives. The issue of corruption among the officials, poor implementation, lack of targeting mechanisms, political and policy instability, among others are affecting the purpose for which N-Power scheme was created. It is still pertinent that problems identified can easily be solved, thereby; the challenges of the programme can still be remedied. Furthermore, there are some cases of misconduct of beneficiaries at their PPA because they know that state governments have little or no power over them. Their payment is paid directly from the Federal Ministry of Finance into their accounts at the end of every month. Understandably that the National Social Investment Office has been dealing with this challenge across the country. The beneficiaries are not properly monitored, particularly those who are posted to schools, farm settlement, health facilities that are located in villages or towns outside the state capitals. Most of them get away with their excesses. Most of them collude with the head of their PPA and get paid for what they have not worked for.

Consequently, beneficiaries are not motivated to identify themselves sufficiently with the successful implementation of the programmes. This is a challenge associated with many poverty reduction programmes as well as N-Power project. The ministries and agencies responsible for policy implementation cannot be left out of the challenges as they lose control over target setting, thereby making it possible for ineffective collaboration and complementation among the three tiers of government. Not only has the failure to ensure the successful implementation of the various programmes and policies drawn the country back, but also continued to spread and deepen poverty, unemployment and other social problems. In addition, in some states where there insufficient teaching staff, three or more subjects were allocated to some N-Power teachers. Some of them take more than three classes. There cannot be efficiency in this kind of situation. Pathetically, some of them do not have a degree in education. This is one of the challenges

of N-Power beneficiary's face at their PPA. In the last recruitment (2017) there were several cases of volunteers posted to states where they have never been to, all these are the major challenges confronting the programme in its attempt to reduce the rate of poverty in Nigeria.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study established that in spite of the expressed concern and efforts of the N-Power Programme towards eradication of poverty in Nigeria, the incidence of poverty has continued to rise. Like the other poverty reduction programmes, which the past and present government in Nigeria have initiated and implemented, the N-Power Programme is still struggling to achieve its objectives. Though those who have benefited from the programme said it has positive impacts on their lives, same cannot be said about the poor who did not benefit from N-Power after several attempts. In other words, despite the efforts of the National Poverty Eradication Programme in reducing poverty, the fact remains that the poverty level in the Nigeria is still high. The study also finds out that the indecision on the part of the government affects efficiency among the volunteers. The fear of what lays ahead needs to be solved, the volunteers want an answer to this, because their job with the government are not secured, there is also insufficient monitoring and synergy between the federal, state and local government on the implementation processes, also the graduate categories are not properly trained compare to the non-graduate categories. The N-Power programme has a good geographical spread devoid of political influence as most of the volunteers got their engagement without knowing anyone at the top. The application was done using ICT without having contact with the employers.

The scheme has successfully engaged 486,795 youths between the ages of 18 and 35 years in a work and paid volunteerism. In the last 5 years of the scheme, the volunteers have worked and earned a monthly stipend of N30,000 across the 774 local Government areas in Nigeria which has lifted them above the poverty line as defined by the United Nation in 2015 which measured poverty as people living on less than \$1.25 a day. It is believed if N-power programme together with the other components of SIP is sustained, not only would it reduce the poverty level in Nigeria it can also lead to sustainable development in Nigeria. Based on the foregoing, the study made the following recommendations: The government should provide adequate employment opportunities and skills acquisition training for the teeming unemployed youth. This is because findings from the study revealed that lack of employment is a major cause of poverty. Government should make a declarative statement about N-Power by giving job security and permanent

enhancement to all beneficiaries. The study also recommended that the real beneficiaries should be involved in the planning stage of the projects so that their views will be considered while designing the projects. This will give them sense of belonging and spur them into judicious use of the benefits/assistance given. This will be an assurance than the way the initiative is designed. Government should equally organize regular basis awareness campaign on its activities; ensure genuine beneficiaries, completion of all approved projects, project evaluation and follow-up to ensure continuity and sustainability. This will be done through monitoring, routine visits and supervisions of projects. The study further recommended that there is need to increase the number of monitoring partners. More monitoring partners are needed to supervise the activities of the beneficiaries. Once they know that officials can come anytime unannounced to their places of assignments, they will sit up. Someone needs to put them on their toes. This will help reduce the level at which volunteers abscond at PPA. The government should continue to do this for achieving the main objective of the programme. The study also suggested the need to actively engage state governments. The federal government needs to engage them in the area of supervision for effectiveness, this will give the states the power to discipline and monitor the beneficiaries who abscond from duties. The state will also assist the federal government in term of training the beneficiaries. The study recognized that the first instrument for poverty reduction policy is to have the right personnel as policy makers; thus social workers are best suited for these positions. Social workers should thus champion pre and pro-poor policies that will be favorable to the poor and help reduce poverty in Nigeria. They should also encourage and empower the poor to take advantage of policies made to benefit and improve their lives. This can be done by encouraging them to participate in the formulation and implementation of policies, programmes and projects aimed at reducing poverty and making their lives better.

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