



THE IMPACT OF N-POWER PROGRAMME ON THE SOCIOECONOMIC LIVELIHOODS OF BENEFICIARIES IN IBADAN NORTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, OYO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Npower scheme is an antidote to curb the prevalent youth unemployment and restiveness which have negatively impacted on the lives of individuals and the country. The selection of beneficiaries for the scheme was in two phases, consisting of 200,000 and 300,000 citizens respectively, across the country between 2016 and 2017, based on interest, application and qualification. The study was conducted in Oyo State to assess the impact of Npower scheme on the beneficiaries. The theoretical framework reviewed and adopted for the study is Structural functionalism. A total number of 250 Npower beneficiaries were selected through simple random sampling technique. The quantitative data collected through questionnaire, from 249 respondents, were analysed with Statistical Package for Social Sciences, version 25. It found out that the programme has had enormous impacts on the socio-economic livelihoods of the beneficiaries including easy access to basic and daily needs, catering for relatives, ability to enrol for further studies, etc. Findings revealed that delay in payments, lack of continuity, among others, were challenges associated with the programme. Therefore, the study recommended continuity of the programme by successive governments, quick payments of monthly stipends, etc.

Keywords: *Empowerment, Graduate, Impact, Npower, Oyo, Poverty Alleviation Programme, Youth,*

Introduction

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, 2020). Nigeria has the largest economy in Africa, ranked 138th in the world based on her nominal GDP of \$496.122 billion and the per capita income projection of \$2,400.45 by the end of 2020 (World Population Review, 2020). As impressive as the above figures

may appear youth unemployment has been one of the major problems facing Nigeria. According to Anyanwu (2017), a high level of unemployment and underemployment is one of the critical socio-economic 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 (2019) 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 socio-economic, 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. 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 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 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 graduate 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 Npower was implemented and coordinated as a strategy to address the ravaging problems associated with youth and community 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 nations 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. It is against this stated background that the researcher embarked on this study to find out the viability of the project and its impact on the beneficiaries and how it will impact on the national growth.

Statement of the Research 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 no an exemption. According to Aliyu (2012), majority of the population in developing countries are averagely poor. In Nigeria and Oyo State 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 Npower 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 social problems, Federal Government of Nigeria under the leadership of President Muhammadu Buhari launched Social Investment Project in which N-Power was one of the arms. N-Power is linked to the Federal Government's policies in the economic, employment and social development arenas. N-Power according to the Punch (2016) set 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 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 Oyo State, Nigeria.

Impact of Npower on the Socioeconomic Livelihoods of the Beneficiaries

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 Npower 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.

Challenges Associated with the Implementation of the Npower Programme

The implementation of different poverty alleviation programmes is associated with a number of challenges. Therefore, N-Power programme is not without

any challenges. Some achievements have been recorded by the programme in the areas of food crop production, agricultural and industrial extension services, primary health care, education enrolment, mass transit programme and financial sector services (Jude, 2017). 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.

Scholars have found a relationship between implementation of poverty reduction programmes and inadequate coordination of the various programmes (Okoroma, 2016; Dlakwa, 2018; Sapru, 2018). They affirm that each institution carries out its own activities with resultant duplication of effort and inefficient use of limited resources. This means that overlapping functions ultimately lead to institutional rivalry and conflicts which then affect programmes. They further observed that severe budgetary, management and governance problems have afflicted most of the programmes, resulting in facilities not being completed, broken down and abandoned, unstaffed and equipped. Poverty related programmes lack accountability and transparency thereby making the programmes to serve as conduit pipes for draining national resources. Inappropriate programme design reflects a lack of involvement of beneficiaries in the formulation and implementation of the programmes.

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. Hence, the development of the country also depends upon the types of policies designed and the efficiency of their implementation. This is also relevant in poverty reduction efforts in Nigeria as Sapru (2018) argues that the policy would remain a mere statement

if the action, in reality, does not take place. Consequently, the success or failure of government's empowerment programme in Nigeria will rely on its implementation stage which according to Sapru (2018) is critical in managing cost, time, and solving the policy problem of unemployment itself. It is also observed that the implementation stage in the policy process usually remains challenging, difficult and critical. This means that it involves interactions among people, government agencies and their activities with each group having own political interest.

N-Power beneficiaries have complained that the stipends remunerated by the Federal Government are not consistent as expected (Lawal, 2017). His investigation revealed that many of the beneficiaries were not paid their monthly stipends even though they were duly registered, mobilised for their posts and regularly attended their place of primary assignments (PPAs). Lawal (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 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.

Theoretical Framework: Structural Functionalist Theory

The structural functionalism approach 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 organicism (Comte) of early 19th century. Organicism 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 Npower 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.

Methods

The study was conducted in Oyo State, Nigeria. Oyo, usually referred to as Oyo State to distinguish it from the city of Oyo, is an inland state in south-western Nigeria, with its capital at Ibadan. It is bounded in the north by Kwara State, in the east by Osun State, in the south by Ogun State and in the west partly by Ogun State and partly by the Republic of Benin. Oyo State consists of thirty-three (33) Local Government Areas in which the Npower beneficiaries were spread across. The target population included all beneficiaries of N-Power programme in the study area. The inclusion of the beneficiaries was to provide adequate assessment of the programme and to give rich, detailed and valid information concerning the programme. The choice of these categories of respondents was also influenced by the fact that the researcher believed they were in the best position to assess the impact of the programme as they were directly affected. The data for the study was primarily sourced directly from the respondents by the researcher using questionnaire. This was done to enable the researcher have first-hand experience by being active participant, collect only what was relevant to the study and make the researcher be in control of how and where information was to be collected.

The study adopted a purposive sampling technique to select 250 respondents who doubled as beneficiaries of the programme. The technique was employed to ensure that only those who fell into the population category were selected. The adoption of the techniques was to ensure that every element of the population was captured and to ensure that only those who had benefited from the scheme were selected. The instrument of data collection for the study was structured questionnaire, self-administered through visitations to various schools, training centres and ministries where most of the Npower beneficiaries were posted. The questionnaire consisted of both open-ended and close-ended

questions. While the open-ended questions allowed respondents to express themselves as much as they could, the close-ended questions provided options from which respondents responded. The questionnaire format will also be structured in line with the specific objectives of the study as well as socio-demographic data of respondents. The data were analysed via Statistical Package for Social Sciences (Version 25) and tabulated for inferences.

Results/Findings

Table 1 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Sex	Male	Female	Total			
Frequency/Percentage	163(66%)	86(34%)	249(100.0)			
Age	18-23	24-29	30-35	Total		
Frequency/Percentage	15(6%)	159(64%)	75(30%)	249(100.0)		
Marital Status	Single	Married	Divorced	Separated	Widowed	Total
Frequency/Percentage	197(79%)	52(21%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	249(100.0)
Number of Children	No child	1-3	4-6	7 above	Total	
Frequency/Percentage	201(81%)	43(17%)	4(2%)	1(0%)	249(100.0)	
Religious Affiliation	Christianity	Islam	Total			
Frequency/Percentage	146(59%)	103(41%)	249(100.0)			
Other Engagements	None	Trading	Artisanship	Contract Staff	Total	
Frequency/Percentage	67(27%)	124(50%)	32(13%)	26(10%)	249(100.0)	

Source: Field Survey, 2020

Table 1 shows respondents' socio-demographic data. Regarding the sex of respondents, 66% were males while 34% were females. This implies that the number of males that participated in this study was more than the female counterpart even though the latter respondents were also significant. This, therefore, means that male respondents participated and contributed more to the study than their female counterparts. The reason for this might mean that more

male beneficiaries were selected, present and ready to participate in the study than the female counterparts. Age distribution of respondents shows that 6% respondents were from 18-23 years, 64% from 24-29 years, while 30% were from 30-35 years. This implies that majority of the respondents were between the ages of 24-29 which directly signifies that the target of the programme were youths. Also, this corroborates the age at which a student is expected to graduate within the context of Nigeria and reflects that most of the beneficiaries have not really spent lengthy years at home without jobs before being engaged by the federal government.

The marital status of respondents reveals that 79% were single, 21% were married, while none was divorced, separated and widowed. This, therefore, means that majority of the respondents who participated in this study were single which may be in connection with the fact that they were young graduates who were still looking for greener pastures. More so, the marital status of the majority of the respondents may also have an association with the age brackets of most of the respondents who participated in the study. The religious affiliations of respondents indicate that 59% were Christians while 41% were Muslims. This indicates that both major religions were adequately represented in the programme and in the study, although, the former were higher in number than the latter. It was revealed in this study that beneficiaries had the opportunities to engage in other activities to improve their skills and to become employable ranging from trading (50%), artisanship (13%), to being contract staff (10%), though (27%) were not involved in any occupational activities apart from the empowerment scheme. This shows how lenient and simple the scheme is, giving room for personal improvement.

Table 2: Impact of Npower Scheme on the Socio-Economic Livelihoods of the Beneficiaries

Variables	Response	Frequency	Percentage
To what extent are you capable of attending to your daily needs without difficulty?	Very Capable	127	51
	Fairly Capable	89	36
	Incapable	33	13
	Total	249	100
How much are you able to cater for the needs of your family	Very Easy	103	41
	Fairly Easy	124	50
	Not Easy	22	9
	Total	249	100

members through the stipends collected?			
Have you been able to further your studies through the stipends given?	Yes, I have finished	20	8
	Yes, I am still on it	49	20
	No, I am still planning it	150	60
	No, the stipends are insufficient	24	10
	No Response	6	2
	Total	249	100
Can you call yourself an achiever for being a beneficiary of Npower programme?	Yes	222	89
	No	19	8
	No Response	8	3
	Total	249	100
To what extent has the programme reduced the rate of graduate unemployment in the state?	Highly reduced	129	52
	Fairly Reduced	85	34
	Not Reduced	35	14
	Total	249	100
Has the implementation of the programme increased the level of literacy in the state?	Yes	184	74
	No	62	25
	No response	3	1
	Total	249	100
What is the level of the programme's contribution to the provision of food security/surplus?	High	64	26
	Medium	128	51
	Low	57	23
	Total	249	100

Source: Field Survey, 2020

Table 2 reveals how the programme has had impacts on the socioeconomic livelihoods of the beneficiaries. 51% respondents claimed that their inclusion in the scheme has enabled them to cater for their daily needs without difficulty as against 13%. This explicates that the scheme has been helpful and elevated the beneficiaries from the poverty line, enabled them to eat at least three-square meals, buy and pay for essential things. The responses of 41% affirm that it was very easy to cater for the needs of the family members through the stipends

collected, while 50% conceived it to be fairly easy, however, 14% had found it uneasy. This implies that majority of the beneficiaries of the scheme in the study area were able to attend to their family members' needs including economic, social and psychological. This probably also means that their selection has made them responsible in feeding the family members and paying the school fees of their children (among the married ones).

The monthly stipends paid to the beneficiaries were used to uplift status, including studying further. In corroboration, 60% respondents agreed to have a plan in studying further from the stipends received, 8% already had finished further studies including Post-Graduate Diploma in Education for the HND beneficiaries, MSc and other academic programmes, while 20% were still in the process of programme completion. A relatively few respondents constituting 10% claimed that the stipends were insufficient to start any educational programmes. This strengthens the findings that the work done is not commensurate to the pay and requires that the government increase the pay to enable beneficiaries to attend to other basic and important needs. However, the fact that the majority had the plans to go further in their studies with the meagre stipends shows that it was helpful and has enabled beneficiaries to progress beyond imagination.

Table 2 also reveals that 89% respondents considered themselves achievers for the positive impact of the scheme. The views of the respondents show that Npower has had an enormous impact on their socioeconomic livelihoods. This also implies that the scheme has not only impacted on the lives of the beneficiaries but also their relatives through the provision of daily needs as well as starting businesses, paying school fees of children, renting apartments for self-comfort, buying clothes and other essentials without difficulty. Based on this finding, 52% claimed that the scheme has highly reduced the rate of graduate unemployment in the study area, as against 34% who felt the reduction was only fair, although, 14% observed no difference in the implementation of the programme and decrease in graduate unemployment. It can be concluded that Npower programme is relatively an antidote for graduate unemployment. The empowerment of the beneficiaries through starting up of businesses and skills acquisition, would make them get engaged meaningfully in the development of their communities and develop favourable attitudes to any efforts to avert criminal tendency by countering the common saying, "an idle hand is devil's workshop". Additionally, the views of 74% indicate that the programme has contributed to an increased level of literacy in the study area through the N-Teach arm. This is probably due to the teaching of students most especially the primary school pupils on how to read and write furthermore, it

implies that the N-teach arm has served as an added advantage to the educational system of the state through increase in teaching manpower. Also, level of the programme's contribution to the provision of food security/surplus was noted by the views of 26% (high), 51%(medium) and 23%(low) respondents respectively through the N-Agro. The views of the majority show that the involvement of the beneficiaries in the agricultural arm of the programme would facilitate interaction between the beneficiaries and farmers on how to boost their farm produce as well as acquiring skills that will ultimately lead to business start-up. This implies that the continuity of the programme and the inclusion of high number of Nigerians, will help to sustain the development goals and contribute to the educational and socio-economic developments of Nigeria as a country.

Table 3: Challenges Associated with the Implementation of the Npower Programme

	Response	Frequency	Percentage
Are the stipends given commensurate to the work expected?	Highly	25	10
	Commensurate	85	34
	Poorly	139	56
	Commensurate		
	Not commensurate		
	Total	249	100
Do you have fear over continuity of the programme after the administration of President Muhammad Buhari?	Yes	215	86
	No	29	12
	No Response	5	2
	Total	249	100
To what extent is the programme supervised?	Well supervised	74	30
	Poorly supervised	168	67
	No Idea	7	3
	Total	249	100
How is the corruption level among the officials of the programme?	None	13	5
	High	131	53
	Moderate	79	32
	Low	26	10
	Total	249	100
	No Interference	34	14

What is the rate of political interference in the selection of beneficiaries?	Yes, and High	22	9
	Yes, but Medium	64	26
	Yes, but Low	128	51
	Total	249	100
Do you experience any delay in terms of the payment of the monthly stipends?	Yes	241	97
	No	5	2
	No Response	3	1
	Total	249	100
Do you think the beneficiaries are the true targets (unemployed/vulnerable youths) of the programme as projected?	Yes	137	55
	No	89	36
	No idea	23	9
	Total	249	100

Source: Field Survey, 2020

Table 3 shows the challenges associated with the Npower scheme which similarly affect the experience of the beneficiaries in the discharge of their responsibilities. Respondents averred that the stipends given were not commensurate to the work done. This may be due to a hike in transport fare; poor payment compared to other employed graduates in sectors like NNPC, FIRSC, CBN, etc.; multiple roles played by beneficiaries; and high handedness surrounding bureaucratic organisations which are new to those who have not been fully employed. In line with this, 86% affirmed that they griped with fears over lack of continuity of the scheme after the expiration of President Muhammad Buhari's administration. This is also affirmed by the ongoing rumours of the termination of the appointment of the 2016 batch of the scheme which has been daily reported on local newspapers and online media platforms. Table 3 also revealed that the programme was poorly supervised by the views of 67% respondents, even though 30% claimed it was well supervised. This is in tandem with truancy, irregularity as well as nonchalant attitudes towards work which sometimes were exhibited by some beneficiaries without any query or punishment from the officials of the scheme. Another justification to this is the multiple workings of beneficiaries in different places at the same time including Federal, State and Local Government parastatals as well as Non-Governmental Organisations. This is also affirmed by 53% who observed that corruption among the officials was high, 32% claimed it was moderate while 10% agreed it was low. This implies that corruption among the officials of the

scheme has compounded the challenges experienced by the beneficiaries which if not controlled could make it difficult to sufficiently meet the target of the scheme and achieve its goals. The corruption may appear in forms of bribery, selecting already employed youths as against vulnerable ones, demanding unnecessary dues from the beneficiaries, among others.

Table 3 shows that the selection of beneficiaries has a little political influence. Based on this assertion, 51% respondents agreed that there was political interference but very low compared to 14% who totally disagreed. This may be in line with the selection of some beneficiaries based on the assumption that some percentage might have been allotted to the political office holders. The political interference was also observed by 9% and 26% respondents who considered it high and medium respectively. This implies that the level of political interference was relatively low and could mean that the scheme was for all and sundry without recourse to political relationship, participation or affiliation. Again, 97% agreed that they have experienced delays in the payments of the monthly stipends which may probably be linked to technical issues, poor management, unperturbed attitudes towards the welfares of the beneficiaries, etc. The last question on the table asked to know if the beneficiaries were the true targets (unemployed/vulnerable youths) of the programme as projected, 55% said yes, 36% said no while 9% said no idea. This means that majority of the selected beneficiaries reflected the true targets of unemployed youth, however, responses from few of them showed that some employed and unqualified individuals, who might be their colleagues, families and friends, also got selected. This implies that the selected beneficiaries of the programme were not critically examined to differentiate between unemployed and employed. This may limit the chance of the qualified applicants and void the selection processes and targets.

Discussion of Findings

The discussion of findings is done in line with the objectives of the study. Findings on the first objective (to assess the impact of Npower programme on the socioeconomic livelihoods of the beneficiaries) revealed that the programme has relatively impacted on the socioeconomic lives of the beneficiaries through ability to cater for personal and family members' needs (social, economic and psychological). This is corroborated by Abbas (2013) who averred that identifying and developing an effective policy framework (e.g. Npower) within international, national, and local resources would benefit citizens, especially the poor. It was also revealed that some beneficiaries were able to enrol for and complete further studies (MSc, PGDE, Professional

Diplomas, among others), while some had the plan of enrolling through the monthly stipends of thirty thousand naira.

Findings revealed that the programme has reduced graduate unemployment to a very large extent, through the skills gained and stipends saved by the beneficiaries to start up personal business and employ others. The findings are supported by Jude (2017) who revealed that some beneficiaries without job before their selection or with meagre salaries from their previous engagements, had glorified the programme for positively impacting on their socioeconomic livelihoods and changing their lifestyles. This study also revealed that the N-Teach arm of the programme has greatly impacted on the educational system in the state by doubling and expanding the teaching manpower as well as increasing the level of literacy through adequate and sufficient teaching and increase in enrolment of pupils. Having found the programme impactful, findings revealed that majority of the beneficiaries considered themselves great achievers for the benefits gained and the influence it had on their socioeconomic lives. Jude (2017) affirms that the N30000 monthly stipends given to beneficiaries have economic and social benefits to individuals and society at large with the, the scheme at least empowers beneficiaries to meet basic needs. The findings of the second objective (to identify challenges associated with the implementation of Npower programme through the beneficiaries), revealed that the stipends were not commensurate to the work done. This may have to do with high demands on the part of the beneficiaries, the distance of the place of primary assignment to a place of residence, hike in the transport fare, poor working conditions, among others. This probably requires that the government step up to increase the stipends in order to enable the beneficiaries to discharge their duties accordingly. Lawal (2017) affirmed the findings of the study by emphasising that N-Power beneficiaries have complained that the stipends remunerated by the Federal Government were not consistent as expected. His investigation also revealed that many of the beneficiaries were not paid their monthly stipends even though they were duly registered, mobilised for their posts and regularly attended their place of primary assignments (PPAs).

Also, findings revealed that most of the beneficiaries were gripped with fears over the lack of continuity of the programme after the expiration of President Buhari's administration. This aligns with the fact the scheme is important in the lives of the beneficiaries. More so, it corroborates with the technical issues which also associates with the challenge of payment delays, corruption among officials, leading to poor supervision, among others. Based on this, Bolaji (2014) discovered that political and policy instability have resulted in frequent policy changes and inconsistent implementation which in turn have prevented

continuity and continuous progress in poverty reduction programmes. In affirmation, Okoroma (2016), Dlakwa (2018) and Sapru (2018) also found a relationship between implementation of poverty reduction programmes (Npower) and inadequate coordination of the programmes. The findings of Lawal (2017) revealed that several challenges were associated with the programme including unmatched names and technical issues.

Findings revealed that political influence in the selection of beneficiaries existed but at a minimal level which was affirmed by the inclusion of the children of the poor without any affiliation to political parties or politicians. Findings also revealed that the target mechanism of the programme was adequate in selecting and identifying the true targets (vulnerable youths/unemployed graduates). However, it was noted that there were still lapses in the target mechanisms due to the selection of those who were already established and or working in other sectors. Bolaji (2014) corroborates this finding by observing that most poverty reduction programmes (e.g. Npower) lack targeting mechanisms in focusing directly on the poor. This might probably limit the chance of the qualified applicants and void the selection processes and targets.

Theoretically, structural functionalism shows that a harmonious relationship among all parts of system, would develop state and the country at large. This is proved by the roles played by the beneficiaries through increase in teaching manpower, farm produce, etc. This will ultimately develop the educational sector, thereby, reduce illiteracy rates, increase the enrolment of children in schools and increase in food surplus as well as sustain developmental goal. Particularly, successful implementation and coordination of the programme will have impact on the discharge of the functions assigned to the beneficiaries and where there are bridges (delay in payments, corruption, etc.), roles become difficult to be played. Where the programme has positive impact on the beneficiaries, it will reflect on various institutions in the country including health, agriculture, law, family, economy, school, transportation, among others. On health, beneficiaries will find it easy to access health facilities, hence, capable of increasing life expectancy, reducing mortality and morbidity rates; start up business to boost the economy, reduce unemployment, poverty and even crimes; stabilise the family by preventing domestic violence, providing basic necessities, upholding morals and providing adequate socialisation. The paper concludes that functionalist theory has demonstrated that national development is possible if the Npower programme is successfully executed, coordinated, harmoniously connected with other programmes and sustained.

Conclusion and Recommendations

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 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 businesses capable 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.

Based on the major findings of the study, the programme is associated with challenges including low and the delay of the monthly stipends, fear over continuity of the programme after the administration of President Muhammad Buhari, poor supervision from the officials, high corruption level among the officials, hence, the following policy 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 Npower 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 their communities.

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