

## The Impact of the N-Power Programme on Youth Empowerment and Poverty Alleviation in Enugu State, Nigeria (2016-2021)

Boris Happy Odalonu  and Richard Oghenerobor Adigu

*Department of Political Science, Federal College of Education, Eha-Amufu, Enugu State, Nigeria.*

*Department of Public Administration, Delta State Polytechnic, Ogwashi-Uku, Delta State, Nigeria.*

Corresponding author: [boris2nice@gmail.com](mailto:boris2nice@gmail.com)

### Abstract

This study examined the impact of the N-Power program on youth empowerment in Enugu State, Nigeria. A survey research design was adopted for the study. Data were generated through primary and secondary sources. Both questionnaires and key interviews were used to generate primary data for the study. Descriptive statistics such as frequency tables, simple percentages, and means were used to organize and analyze the data. The findings revealed that the N-Power program is confronted with numerous challenges, such as no linkage to job opportunities and credit facilities after completing the vocational training and the non-provision of a free interest loan to the beneficiaries who are interested in starting up their small-scale enterprises after their vocational training. It was also revealed that the implementation of the program is characterized by corrupt practices, a lack of adequate funding, a lack of transparency and accountability in the management of the program, delayed payment of stipends to the beneficiaries, and overbearing hands and interests by the politicians. Based on the findings, the study recommended that the posting of N-Power beneficiaries should be close to their areas of assignment; there should be adequate funding of the N-Power program; prompt payment of stipends to the beneficiaries as and when due; permanent employment of the beneficiaries after the two-year program; and a free interest loan should be given to the beneficiaries who wish to set up their own business.

**Keywords:** N-Power, Empowerment, Poverty Reduction, Youth, Enugu State.

### Introduction

The issue of poverty is a problem that affects people all over the world. There is a great deal of variation in poverty rates around the world. In developed countries, the percentage of people living in poverty is minimal, while the percentage of people living in poverty is always high in developing countries. There is a problem with poverty in Nigeria; this is likely due to poor management of resources, indiscipline, and a lack of political will by the government. This problem has been ongoing for many years (Adebayo, 2009, cited in Abada & Omeh, 2019).

However, instead of tackling the crisis that has bedeviled development and poverty in Nigeria, the politicians and other government functionaries appear to have turned leadership positions and public offices into a means to siphon the public treasury. The two organizations engaged in similar unethical behaviors, including the misuse of funds and laundering of money, which left the poor masses struggling. As a result of Nigeria's continuing poverty and underdevelopment, crime has become rampant, including incidents

of armed robbery, cultism, drug trafficking, prostitution, child labor and trafficking, ritual killings, and assassination (Akande, 2014, cited in Abada & Omeh, 2019).

Nigeria has a lot of resources that could make it a powerful economy and financial center in Africa and one of the leading economies in the world. Despite all the blessings we've been given, there has been a lot of poverty and unemployment. Nigeria is in the same boat as most other developing countries—struggling with high levels of youth unemployment, poverty, and low economic growth. The high unemployment rate among young people is likely to be a major factor in the high rate of poverty and insecurity in the country (Aminu, 2019). Consequently, successive governments have demonstrated concerns about the high level of poverty in the country by setting up poverty alleviation programs.

They have at different times introduced various poverty alleviation programs such as Operation Feed the Nation, the Green Revolution, otherwise known as "Back to Land, the Directorate for Food, Roads, and Infrastructure (DFRRI), the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), the Better Life Programme (BLP), the Peoples Bank of Nigeria (PBN), the Family Support Programme (FSP), and the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP). National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P), National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), et cetera (Odalonu & Obani, 2018; Aminu, 2019; Bisong, 2019; Abada & Omeh, 2019). A review of these poverty alleviation programs revealed some degree of ineffectiveness in achieving the set objectives or in producing the anticipated results because of poor implementation, a high level of inconsistencies, corruption, and a lack of proper coordination (Aminu, 2019).

As part of efforts to address the prevalent scale of unemployment and poverty and improve the condition of living of the extremely poor and vulnerable Nigerians, the President Buhari-led Federal Government rolled out a comprehensive National Social Safety Net Programme in 2016 called the National Social Investment Programme (NSIP) (Aliogo, 2019; Asu, 2019; Ogbette, Bernard-Oyoyo, & Okoh, 2019:70). The National Social Investment Program (NSIP) consists of four major components. These are the National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSF), the Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) Programme, the Government Enterprise Empowerment Programme (GEEP), and the Job Creation and Youth Empowerment (N-Power) Programme (Aliogo, 2019; Bisong, 2019).

The N-Power programs are divided into three parts: N-Power Volunteer Corps (N-teach), N-Power Knowledge, and N-Power Build (Ogbette, Bernard-Oyoyo, & Okoh, 2019). However, the key components of the 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 (Akujuru and Enyioko, 2019). Specifically, the N-Power programme, which took off in December 2016, was designed to provide a stopgap for 500,000 unemployed graduates of tertiary institutions over the next two years (Bennel, 2017). While the Federal Government is responsible for their monthly stipends, it works in partnership with state governments to verify selected unemployed graduates and deploy

them to their places of primary assignment. Volunteer graduates are expected to serve in the communities where they are residents (Akujuru & Enyioko, 2019).

However, the N-Power programme is like unemployment insurance because it caters to unemployed graduates from Nigerian colleges of education, polytechnics, and universities (Ayeni, Sani, Idris, & Uzoigwe, 2019). It has been observed that unemployment insurance may not be in the best interest of the economy as a whole because such a benefit does not empower the beneficiary to be independent in the future. Though there is no doubt that the N-Power program has provided temporary employment for people's immediate satisfaction, the main concern now is what the condition of the beneficiaries will be after the expiration of the program, when the little cash they are getting will no longer be available (Ayeni et al., 2019). The doubt on whether the N-Power programme currently embarked upon by the Federal Government of Nigeria can empower Nigerian youths and reduce poverty, in the long run, prompted the researcher to embark on this research.

### **Statements of the Problem**

The rising poverty level and youth unemployment in Nigeria since 1999 prompted the design and implementation of different anti-poverty programmes to assist the poor in escaping poverty (Awojobi, 2019). Thus, successive governments since 1999 have initiated and implemented social protection programmes aimed at curbing unemployment and reducing the level of poverty in Nigeria. However, irrespective of the creation and implementation of anti-poverty programmes, the level of poverty keeps rising. These programmes failed to have a significant impact as the country's population living below global poverty has continued to rise (Onah & Olise, 2019). As of 2019, 58.13% of the population of Enugu was living below the poverty line (Statista, 2020).

Consequently, the N-Power programme was introduced by the Federal Government as a social safety net to reduce the rate of youth unemployment plaguing the country and tackle poverty issues. Specifically, the programme took off in December 2016, and it was designed in such a manner that, if well implemented, it can help address the challenges of empowerment and, subsequently, reduce poverty among youths (Akujuru & Enyioko, 2019). The N-Power programme aims to improve the living standards of beneficiaries through entrepreneurship promotion, employment, and skills acquisition (Onah & Olise, 2019).

However, two years after the creation of the N-Power programme, the poverty level keeps soaring. Data from the Brookings Institute revealed that as of June 2018, Nigeria became the world capital of people living in extreme poverty, thereby overtaking India, which previously occupied such a position (Kharas, Hamel, & Hofer, 2018; Vanguard, 2019). The trajectories of the findings suggest that Nigeria has around 87 million people living in extreme poverty, and six people fall into extreme poverty every minute (Kharas et al., 2018; Awojobi, 2019).

Again, looking at the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics 2018 data, showed a 23.1% increase in unemployment for the third quarter of 2018, which brought the total number of

unemployed in the country to over 21 million Nigerians (Ogbette et al., 2019). This raises concern about the potential of the N-Power programme to achieve the reduction of youth unemployment and poverty in Nigeria on a sustainable basis, considering that it has been in operation for over two years (Onah & Olise, 2019). Again, as of 2020, 31.62% of the youth population of Enugu State was unemployed (Statista, 2020).

Currently, the N-Power programme has been implemented for over five years throughout the federation. Five years later, it is pertinent to ask questions. Has the programme succeeded in alleviating the problems of poverty and unemployment? What are the challenges militating against the effective implementation of the N-Power programme? To answer the above questions, the researcher embarked on this study to assess how far the N-Power programme has impacted the economic well-being of the beneficiaries, particularly in Enugu State.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of this study are:

1. To assess the contribution of the N-Power programme to youth empowerment in Enugu State.
2. To evaluate the impact of the N-Power programme on economic well-being and poverty reduction among the beneficiaries in Enugu State.
3. To identify the challenges facing the effective implementation of the N-Power programme in Enugu State.
4. To suggest ways of improving the implementation of the N-Power programme in Enugu State and Nigeria in general.

### **Conceptual Discourse**

The major topics that are related to this study were reviewed here accordingly. These topics include poverty, poverty reduction, youth and youth empowerment, and the N-Power Programme. Also, the theoretical framework is explained in this section.

### **The Concepts of Poverty and Poverty Reduction**

Poverty is a multidimensional and socially contested concept that is difficult to define (Adegbenle, 2019:25). Being multidimensional in nature, "poverty entails inadequate livelihood material goods and failure to achieve basic capabilities in nutrition, health, economics, and social life (Abada & Omeh, 2019:708). According to Iloh & Olewe (2018:9), "poverty is a multidimensional social phenomenon influenced by a wide range of factors; therefore, poor people include a lack of access to income-earning and productive activities and to essential social services". Poverty is seen as a state of deprivation or a state of being poor. The poor are those that are incapable of purchasing necessities like food, housing (shelter), healthcare, education, and so on (Salisu & Adejumo, 2017; Adegbenle, 2019). According to Oduwole (2015:27), "poverty is conceived as a state of deprivation in terms of economic and social indicators such as income, education, healthcare, social status, self-

esteem, and self-actualization". Universally, poverty is measured using national and international income and consumption rates pegged to US\$1 per day for ease of assessment (Abada & Omeh, 2019). If the US\$1 poverty line is used, a report attests that 90.8 percent of Nigerians would, therefore, be living below poverty (Kpelai, 2013, cited in Adegbenle, 2019:25).

The UNDP Human Development Report (2006:26) defines poverty as the "deprivation side of human development—the denial of basic choices and opportunities to lead a long, healthy, creative, and free life; to enjoy a decent standard of living; and to participate in the life of the community, including political freedom and cultural choices". However, the Copenhagen Declaration of 1995 sheds more light on what constitutes poverty when it asserts that: *"Poverty has various manifestations, including lack of income and productive resources sufficient to ensure sustainable livelihood; it is characterized by hunger and malnutrition; ill health; limited or lack of access to education and other basic services; increased mortality from illness; homelessness and inadequate housing; unsafe environments; social discrimination and exclusions"* (Iloh & Olewe, 2018:9).

As noted by Adebayo (2009), Ucha (2010), Taiwo and Aguu (2016), and Abada & Omeh (2019), poverty is a consequence of deprivation, lack of good health, and social or economic exclusion, including lack of access to active involvement in community life in all its ramifications.

Poverty alleviation, on the other hand, is any mechanism, intervention, or structure put in place to curb or reduce the level of poverty. In reaction to the terrible poverty crisis in Nigeria, different interventionist programs have been established by successive governments. Poverty alleviation strategies implemented so far in Nigeria have focused more on growth, basic needs, and rural development approaches. However, poverty alleviation programs 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. Measures taken to combat poverty and promote development in the country started at the beginning of Nigeria's statehood. This was achieved through the adoption of different development plans (Hussaini, 2014).

### **The Concepts of Youth and Youth Empowerment**

There is no universally acceptable definition of the concept of youth. Thus, different scholars and institutions have defined the concept differently. According to the United Nations (2010), youths are those between the ages of 15 and 24. This definition considers those under the age of 14 as children. However, under the Rights of the Child, persons up to the age of 18 are defined as children. The broader use of the term underscores the need for policies and programs to focus less on age and more on recognizing the specific development needs of people as they transit from childhood to adulthood (UN, 2010; Abada & Omeh, 2019).

The National Youth Policy and Strategic Plan of Action define youth as persons between the ages of 18 and 35 who are citizens of Nigeria. This implies that youth can be regarded as any person in the stage of transition to adulthood who depends on others for means of survival, shelter, and other necessities of life. Youths are seen as "the foundation of a society; their energies, character, inventiveness, and orientation define the pattern of development and security of a nation. They are the most volatile and yet the most vulnerable segment of the population in terms of socio-economic, emotional, and other aspects" (Zakaria, 2006, cited in Abada & Omeh, 2019: 708).

On the other hand, youth empowerment is conceived as a "mean or way of enhancing the life condition of the powerless or less privileged ones (particularly the youths) in the state (Abdussalam, 2015:36). The World Bank (2002:14) defined empowerment as "the expansion of the assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives". Similarly, youth empowerment has been defined by Okwudili and Emmanuel (2014:28) as "the process whereby young people gain the ability and authority to make decisions and implement change in their own lives and the lives of others".

Therefore, the main purpose of youth empowerment is to encourage youths to acquire entrepreneurial skills and knowledge to become independent. This is usually done by providing youth with training facilities and funding (Abada & Omeh, 2019). Empowering young people means creating and supporting the enabling conditions under which young people can act on their behalf and their terms, rather than at the directions of others. The enabling conditions, according to Aderonmu (2017), cited in Akujuru & Enyioko (2019: 34), fall into four broad categories: "an economic and social base; political will; adequate resource allocation; supportive legal and administrative frameworks; a stable environment of equality, peace, and democracy; access to knowledge, information, and skills; and a positive value system".

The introduction of the N-Power Programme under the umbrella of social empowerment safety net represents a strategy for alleviating poverty among youth through training in vocational jobs and the provision of micro-credit in a sustainable manner as a tool for self-actualization and empowerment (Enyioko, 2006; cited in Akujuru & Enyioko, 2019:34). However, the need to improve youth empowerment in Nigeria is not the concern of the government alone. Youth empowerment concerns individuals and non-governmental organizations (Abada & Omeh, 2019).

### **N-Power Programme**

The N-Power is a job creation and empowerment program of the National Social Investment Programme of the Federal Government of Nigeria, initiated by the Federal Government of Nigeria under the present administration of President Buhari (Abada & Omeh, 2019:709; Odey & Sambe, 2019:4). It was designed to help provide job creation and empowerment for young Nigerians to acquire and develop life-long skills to become

solution providers in their communities and to become players in the domestic and global markets (Abada & Omeh, 2019).

The N-Power programme is a social intervention policy made by the federal government to provide job opportunities for unemployed youths in Nigeria. This was also to reduce social and economic dependence among young graduates of this nation. It is also an innovative means to enhance public services that are short on manpower in the areas of basic education, agriculture, and primary healthcare (Iloh & Olewe, 2018:7). Thus, the N-Power programme has been designed for young Nigerians between the ages of 18 and 35. It is a paid volunteer programme with a two-year duration. In the specifications of the programme, graduates are required to undertake their primary tasks in identified public services within their proximate communities. All N-Power beneficiaries were entitled to computer devices that contained information necessary for their specific engagement as well as information for their continuous training and development (N-Power Information Guide, 2017, Odey & Sambe, 2019).

The N-Power is aimed at addressing the challenges of unemployment, especially among graduate youths, as it is categorized into the Graduate Teachers Corps, which is targeted at 500,000 graduates. N-Power Knowledge is targeting 25,000 non-graduates, while N-Power Build targets 75,000 non-graduates in recruitment. Through N-Power, young Nigerian youths will be empowered with the necessary tools to go and create, develop, build, fix, and work on exceptional ideas, projects, and enterprises that will change communities, the economy, and the nation (Abada & Omeh, 2019:709). The objectives of N-Power are:

1. To reduce the rate of unemployment in the country.
2. To intervene and directly improve the livelihood of a critical mass of young, unemployed Nigerians.
3. To develop a qualitative system for the transfer of employability, entrepreneurial, and technical skills.
4. To create an ecosystem of solutions for ailing public services and government diversification policies.
5. To develop and enhance Nigeria's knowledge economy to bring solutions to poorly implemented public service and government diversification policies (Iloh & Olewe, 2018: 8; Odey & Sambe, 2019: 4; Abada & Omeh, 2019: 709).

### **The Key Areas of the N-Power Programme**

The N-Power programme is divided into the following categories: a. Graduate Category, which is comprised of N-Power Volunteer Corps b. Non-Graduate Category, comprising N-Power Knowledge and N-Power Build (Odey & Sambe, 2019:4) According to the N-Power Information Guide (2017), volunteers are expected to provide teaching, instructional, and advisory solutions in four (4) key areas, such as the N-Power Agro Programme, the N-Power Health Programme, the N-Power Teach Programme, and the Voluntary Asset and Income Declaration Scheme (VAIDS) (Odey & Sambe, 2019:4; Abada & Omeh, 2019:10). However, in 2017, other non-graduate strands of the N-Power program were introduced. Hence,



Abada & Omeh (2019) stated that the participants of the N-Power program are to provide teaching, instructional, and advisory solutions in the following areas below: N-Power Agro Programme, N-Power Health Programme, N-Power Teach Programme, (d) N-Power Tax Programme, N-Power Community Education Programme, N-Power Knowledge Programmes, N-Power Creative Programme, N-Power Tech Hardware, N-Power Tech Software, and N-Power Build Programme (Abada & Omeh, 2019:10).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Different theories are suitable for this study. Such theories include systems theory, elite theory, theory of public policy implementation, et cetera. However, the researchers adopted empowerment theory for the study. This theory is more appropriate for this study. The empowerment theory was propounded by Solomon (1976) in his book titled *Black Empowerment*. According to his postulation, personal, interpersonal, and environmental resources are needed to update the skills, knowledge, and motivation of people to achieve valid social roles. He further maintains that powerlessness and a feeling of hopelessness are a result of the inability to use resources and support to achieve empowerment. Empowerment theory provides an effective support system for individuals and communities that have been blocked from achieving collective goals and overcoming social barriers and self-fulfillment within existing social structures (Okala and Uche, 2014; Abada & Omeh, 2019).

However, the initiation of multifarious social schemes in Nigeria by different political regimes has become a source of empowerment for the citizens, especially the vulnerable youths who are jobless and roaming the streets. Social schemes and packages like the Graduate Internship Scheme, N-Power, and conditional transfers of money to the youth have become successful and empowered. The beneficiaries are bent on using the acquired knowledge to develop themselves and the entire society. The implication is the involvement of youths in the decision-making process and their contribution economically to the growth of the economy (Abada & Omeh, 2019).

### **Methodology**

A survey research design was adopted for conducting this research. The design enabled the researcher to generate data from a cross-section of the respondents in the area of study. A purposive sampling technique was used in selecting the location, while a simple random sampling technique was used in selecting the sample for this study. The data for this study comprises primary and secondary sources of data. The primary sources of data were generated through the use of questionnaires and in-depth interviews with key stakeholders in the N-Power programme in Enugu State. The questionnaire was presented in a 4-point Likert scale format of Strongly Agree. (SA<sub>4</sub>), agree (A<sub>3</sub>), disagree (D<sub>2</sub>), and strongly disagree (SD<sub>1</sub>). The secondary sources of data for this study were gathered from books, previous research works, government publications, journal publications, newspapers, and internet/online materials. A total of two hundred (200) copies of questionnaires were



distributed to the beneficiaries of the N-Power programme in Enugu State, and one hundred and ninety-five (195) were retrieved. Thus, the responses from the 195 retrieved questionnaires were used to analyze the data for the study. descriptive statistics such as frequency tables, simple percentages, and mean scores derived from a 4-point Likert-type scale with a decision point of 2.5 were employed in data analysis. The data generated through the interview was transcribed and the content was analyzed

## Results

The data generated for the study were presented and analyzed according to the specific objectives and main research questions of the study.

**Research Question 1:** Has the N-Power programme contributed to youth empowerment in Enugu State?

**Table 1.** N-Power Contribution to Youth Empowerment in Enugu State. N=195

S/N	Item/Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Total Score	Mean x	Decision
1	The N-Power programme has provided a structure for relevant skills acquisition and development	68	96	20	11	611	3.1	Accepted
2	The N-Power programme has empowered the youth in Enugu State economically	74	100	16	5	633	3.2	Accepted
3	The N-Power programme has equipped less educated youths with skills for self-employment	76	96	20	3	635	3.3	Accepted
4	The empowered youths through the N-Power programme are usually linked to job opportunities and credit facilities after completing their vocational training	10	32	90	63	379	1.9	Rejected
5	The N-Power beneficiaries that have been empowered through skill acquisition were given soft loans to set up their businesses	20	52	88	35	447	2.3	Rejected
6	The government provided interest-free loans to interested volunteers to start up their small or medium-scale enterprises after their vocational training	22	44	78	51	427	2.2	Rejected

Source: Field Survey, 2021

The table above reveals the contribution of the N-Power Programme to Youth Empowerment in Enugu State as follows: N-Power programme has provided a structure for relevant skills acquisition and development ( $X=3.1$ ), the N-Power programme has empowered the youth in Enugu State ( $X=3.2$ ), N-Power programme has equipped less educated youths with skills for self-employment ( $X=3.3$ ), the empowered youths through N-Power programme are usually linked to job opportunities and credit facilities after completing their vocational training ( $X=1.9$ ), the N-Power beneficiaries that have been empowered through skill acquisition were given soft loan to set up their businesses ( $X=2.3$ ) and Government provided interest-free loans to interested volunteers to start up their small or medium scale enterprises after their vocational training ( $X=2.2$ ).

**Research Question 2:** Has the N-Power programme impacted poverty reduction among the youths in Enugu State?

**Table 2.** The Impact of the N-Power Programme on Poverty Reduction among the Youths in Enugu State.  $N=195$

S/N	Item/Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Total Score	Mean x	Decision
1	The N-Power programme has reduced the level of youth unemployment in Enugu State	80	76	28	11	615	3.2	Accepted
2	N-power programme can only be beneficiary to the youths in the short run, but not in the long run	12	34	96	53	395	2.0	Rejected
3	The N30,000, paid to the N-Power beneficiaries monthly is capable of taking the beneficiaries out of borderline poverty	46	74	48	27	529	2.7	Accepted
4	The stipend paid to empowered youths correlates to a substantial upliftment of the youth out of relative poverty	30	90	50	25	515	2.6	Accepted
5	The programme has not improved upon the beneficiaries' lives in Enugu State	31	54	66	44	464	2.4	Rejected

**Source:** Field survey, 2021

The table above reveals the impact of the N-Power programme on poverty reduction among the youths in Enugu State as follows: The N-Power programme has reduced the level of youth unemployment in Enugu State ( $X=3.2$ ), N-power programme can only be beneficiary to the youths at the short run, but not at the long run ( $X=2.0$ ), the N30,000, paid to the N-Power beneficiaries monthly is capable of taking the beneficiaries out of borderline

poverty ( $X=2.7$ ), the stipend paid to empowered youths correlate to a substantial upliftment of the youth out of relative poverty ( $X=2.3$ ) and the programme has not improved upon the beneficiaries' lives in Enugu State ( $X=2.4$ ).

**Research Question 3:** Are there challenges militating against the effective implementation of the N-Power programme in Enugu State?

**Table 3.** Challenges Facing the Effective Implementation of N-Power Programme in Enugu State.  $N=195$

S/N	Item/Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Total Score	Mean $\bar{x}$	Decision
1	Lack of adequate funding is one of the challenges confronting the implementation of the N-Power programme	88	78	20	9	631	3.2	Accepted
2	There is a lack of transparency and accountability in the implementation and management of the N-Power programme	82	86	24	3	637	3.3	Accepted
3	The N-Power programme has been bedeviled with corrupt practices.	80	54	46	15	589	3.0	Accepted
4	There are overbearing hands of politicians in the programme	76	78	26	15	605	3.1	Accepted
5	The N-Power programme is confronted with delayed payment of stipends to the beneficiaries	62	70	44	19	565	2.9	Accepted

**Source:** Field survey, 2021

The table above reveals the challenges facing the effective implementation of the N-Power programme in Enugu State as follows: lack of adequate funding is one of the challenges confronting the implementation of the N-Power program ( $X = 3.2$ ), there is a lack of transparency and accountability in the implementation and management of the N-Power programme ( $X = 3.3$ ), and the N-Power programme has been bedeviled with corrupt practices. ( $X = 3.0$ ), there are overbearing hands of politicians in the programme ( $X = 3.1$ ), and the N-Power program is confronted with delayed payment of stipends to the beneficiaries ( $X = 2.9$ ). All the statements were accepted as the challenges facing the effective implementation of the N-Power programme in Enugu State and Nigeria in general.

**Research Question 4:** Are there ways the implementation of the N-Power programme can be improved in Enugu State and Nigeria in general?

**Table 4.** Ways to Improve the Implementation of the N-Power Programme in Enugu State and Nigeria in general. N=195

S/N	Item/Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Total Score	Mean x	Decision
1	The N-Power beneficiaries should be posted close to their area of residence	106	62	36	1	663	3.4	Accepted
2	The N-Power programme should be adequately funded to make their work easy.	112	74	7	2	686	3.5	Accepted
3	The N-Power beneficiaries should be paid when due.	137	52	6	0	716	3.7	Accepted
4	The N-Power beneficiaries that are up and doing should be retained and permanently employed.	120	54	12	9	671	3.4	Accepted
5	The N-Power beneficiaries or trainees who have concluded the two years training programme should be granted a soft loan to set up their businesses.	116	60	12	7	675	3.5	Accepted

**Source:** Field survey, 2021

The table above reveals the ways to improve the implementation of the N-Power programme in Enugu State and Nigeria in general, as follows: the N-Power beneficiaries should be posted close to their area of residence ( $X = 3.4$ ), the N-Power programme should be adequately funded to make their work easier ( $X = 3.5$ ), and the N-Power beneficiaries should be paid when due. ( $X = 3.7$ ), the N-Power beneficiaries who are up and doing should be retained and permanently employed ( $X = 3.4$ ), and the N-Power beneficiaries or trainees who have concluded the two-year training program should be granted a soft loan to set up their businesses ( $X = 3.5$ ). This shows that all the statements in the table were accepted as strategies to improve the implementation of the N-Power programme in Enugu State and Nigeria in general.

### Discussion of Findings

The data on biographical details of the respondents revealed that the majority of the respondents are within the age bracket of 18–23 years, with a total of 114 (58%) responses out of the 195 sampled. In terms of the sex of the respondents, it revealed that more than half of the total respondents are males, for a total of 125 (64%). It also revealed that the majority of the respondents are single, with a total score of 167 (86%). In terms of educational qualification, the data also revealed that the majority of the respondents

possess an OND or NCE, with a total score of 114 (59%). Finally, data shows that the highest beneficiaries of the categories of the N-Power strand are the N-Teach programme, with a percentage of 82 (42%).

This finding collaborated with the work of Odey & Sambe (2019:10), which revealed that the N-Teach strand dominates. The findings in this study also corroborated the work of Odey & Sambe (2019) on the assessment of the contribution of the N-Power programme to youth empowerment in Cross River State, Nigeria. The study discovered that the beneficiaries of the N-Power programme were mostly composed of the N-Teach strand of the programme. According to Odey & Sambe (2019:10), "it appears that the number of N-Teach beneficiaries engaged is generally greater than other strands of the programme." In an interview with a key informant, the following was noted:

*"When the programme started in 2016, we had four key strands, such as the N-Agro programme, the N-Health programme, the N-Teach programme, and the Voluntary Assets and Income Declaration Scheme (N-VAIDS programme). Out of these four strands, the N-Teach strand used to be the most sought-after for the beneficiaries. This is because most of our public primary schools lack teaching staff. However, since 2017, more strands have been incorporated into the program. Currently, we have a non-graduate category known as N-Build, N-Tech software, N-Tech hardware, N-Creative, etc. The non-graduates were trained in some skill acquisition in automobiles, autotronics painting, and cosmetology. At the end of their training, they were given tool kits with which they could work and start up their businesses. The graduate category was paid 30,000 per month, and non-graduates were paid 10,000 per month, but they were opportune to be trained"* (Interview with Key Informant at the National Social Investment Programme Office in Enugu, 2021).

The data in Table 1 revealed that the N-Power programme has contributed to youth empowerment in Enugu State, such as the provision of structures for relevant skills acquisition and development for self-employment. However, the empowered youths through the N-Power programme are not usually linked to job opportunities and credit facilities after completing their vocational training. Also, the N-Power beneficiaries who have been empowered through skill acquisition were not given soft loans to set up their businesses. Thus, the Federal Government has not provided interest-free loans to interested volunteers to start up their small or medium-scale enterprises after their vocational training. The findings in this study also corroborated the work of Odey & Sambe (2019) on the assessment of the contribution of the N-Power programme to youth empowerment in Cross River State, Nigeria. The study found that N-Power contributed to the empowerment of youth through poverty reduction, proficiency skills in ICT, financial empowerment, on-the-job experience, and investment in small-scale businesses. Also, the findings corroborated the work of Bisong (2019) on the impact of the N-Power scheme on employment generation, the economic well-being of beneficiaries, and job skills enhancement of beneficiaries in the Cross River South senatorial district. The results of the study indicated that there is a significant positive relationship between the N-Power

scheme and the following variables: economic well-being, job skill enhancement, and employment generation.

The data in Table 2 also revealed that the N-Power programme has impacted poverty reduction among the youths in Enugu State by way of reducing youth unemployment. The monthly stipend paid to the beneficiaries has lifted the youth out of borderline and relative poverty. Thus, the N-Power programme has improved the beneficiaries' lives in Enugu State; however, the N-Power programme can only benefit the youths in the short run but not in the long run in terms of poverty reduction. These findings are in line with the qualitative information obtained from the key informant interview below. Except for an interview with a key informant:

*"The programme started in Nigeria as a social investment program of the Federal Government of Nigeria, which was geared towards reducing poverty and unemployment. It was initiated by Muhammadu Buhari, and it started in 2016 in Enugu State. So far, the program has reduced the problem of unemployment and increased the productive skills of Nigerian youths. It has boosted the economic activities of Enugu State and improved the living standards of its people. It has taken several unemployed youths out of the streets and reduced social vices. It has trained and equipped unemployed youths to become self-reliant. It has also helped in closing the manpower gap in three key sectors: education, agriculture, and health".* (Interview with Key Informant at National Social Investment Programme Office in Enugu, February 2021).

Table 3 shows that there are numerous challenges confronting the effective implementation of the N-Power programme in Enugu State and Nigeria in general. It revealed that the N-Power programme has been bedeviled with corrupt practices, a lack of adequate funding, and a lack of transparency and accountability in the implementation and management of the programme. It also revealed that stipends to the beneficiaries are not paid as when due, and the programme has overbearing hands and interests by the politicians. Excerpt from the interview with a key informant:

*"One of the challenges that led to delayed payment of stipends to the beneficiaries was that the bank verification numbers (BVN) of some of the beneficiaries were not linked to the account numbers provided in their profiles. Hence, payment could not be made to such accounts. However, those with verified BVN have been paid when due".* (Interview with Key Informant at National Social Investment Programme Office in Enugu, February 2021).

Data from Table 4 revealed that there are different ways to improve the implementation of the N-Power programme in Enugu State and Nigeria in general. Such ways include: the N-Power beneficiaries should be posted close to their area of residence; the N-Power programme should be adequately funded; the N-Power beneficiaries should be paid when due; the N-Power beneficiaries that are up and doing should be retained and permanently employed; and the N-Power beneficiaries or trainees who have concluded the two-year training programme should be granted a soft loan to set up their businesses. These would go a long way in solving some of the problems confronting the implementation of the N-Power programme.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

The study examined the impact of the N-Power programme on youth empowerment and poverty alleviation in Enugu state, Nigeria from 2016 to 2021. The findings of the study have shown that the N-Power programme is a useful tool and strategy to empower youths and reduce poverty in Nigeria if well implemented. However, the programme has been characterized by some bottlenecks. Therefore, this study has made some recommendations that would go a long way in resolving some of these challenges. Based on the findings of this study, the following are the recommendations:

1. The N-Power beneficiaries who have been empowered through skill acquisition should be given soft loans to set up their businesses. Thus, the Federal Government should provide interest-free loans to interested volunteers to start up their small or medium-scale enterprises after their vocational training.
2. The empowered youths through the N-Power programme should be linked to job opportunities and credit facilities after completing their vocational training.
3. The beneficiaries that are up and doing should be retained and permanently employed.
4. There should be some levels of accountability and transparency in the implementation of the Programme.
5. The federal government should adequately release funds for the smooth and effective implementation of the programme.
6. The N-Power beneficiaries and volunteers should be posted close to their areas of assignment.
7. There should be prompt payment of stipends to the beneficiaries as and when due.

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