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IMPACT OF N-POWER PROGRAMMES ON YOUTHS' EMPOWERMENT IN BIASE LOCAL GOVERNMENT OF CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated the impact of N-power programmes on youths' empowerment in Biase Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. Two research questions were formulated to guide the study. The study adopted survey research design. The population of the study was 500 comprising of 292 male and 208 female youths. There was no sampling because the population is small and manageable. The instrument for data collection was a structured 22-item questionnaire titled "N-Power Programmes and Youth Empowerment Questionnaire (NPPYEQ)". The instrument was designed on a 4-point Likert scale of Very Great Extent, Great Extent, Low Extent and Very Low Extent with values of 4, 3, 2 and 1, respectively. The instrument was validated by three experts, two from the Department of Continuing Education and Development Studies and one from the Department of Mathematics and Computer (Measurement and Evaluation Unit). Cronbach Alpha method was used for the reliability of the study. Reliability coefficient which yielded 0.81 and 0.84 index was highly reliable and used for the study. The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. The findings revealed that N-power Agro and N-power build programmes have significantly impact on youths empowerment in the study area to a great extent. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended among others that government should ensure timely release of funds for the procurement of modern farm tools required in promoting agricultural activities.

Keywords: N-Power, Programmes, Youths, Empowerment, Impact

Introduction

One of the major reasons why developed nations invest huge financial resources in human capital development, especially among the youths can be attributed to the fact that the youths have sufficient energy, creative drives, and desire to change their world. According to United Nations as cited in Odey and Sambe (2019), the global youth population estimate in 2019 is 2,000,000,000 billion while Sub-Saharan Africa youth population was placed at 211, 000,000 million. Precisely, in Nigeria, the estimated population of the youth between the ages of 18-35 is 52.8 percent Odey and Sambe (2019). Ordinarily, anybody within the age of 18 – 40 can be categorised as a young person. By implication, 70 percent of Nigeria's population are youth (Fayehun and Isiugo-Abanihe, 2020). Regrettably, the National Bureau of Statistics (2020) reported that the youth unemployment rate was around 53.40 percent in 2020 while the figure continued to shoot up as of January, 2021.

N-power programme is a youth employment scheme sponsored by the Federal Government of Nigeria. N-power programme addresses the challenge of youth unemployment by providing a structure for large-scale and relevant work skills acquisition and development while linking its core and outcomes of fixing inadequate public services and stimulating the larger economy. N-power programme aspires to provide a plate form where most Nigerians can access skills acquisition and development. However, the initial modular programmes in N-power are designed for Nigeria citizens between the ages of 18 and 35 years. The programmes under N-power will ensure that each participant will learn and practice most of what is necessary to find or create work. (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2016).

The N-power programme has become a household name and has continued to generate some controversy, although the government is living up to its billing in addressing concerns raised in association with the programme. The N-power programme of the Federal Government is a job creation and empowerment initiative of the Social Investment Programme, designed to drastically reduce youths' unemployment in Nigeria (Akujuru and Enyioko, 2019). The focus is to provide

our young graduates and non-graduates with the skills, tools and livelihood to enable them advance from empowerment to entrepreneurship and innovation.

The N-power programme was initiated by the government of President Muhammadu Buhari in 2016. N-power programme as it stands today is one of the National Social Investment Programmes established on June 8th 2016. The programme was designed to address the problem of youths' empowerment and improve social development (Dauda, Adeyeye, Yakubu, Oni and Umar, 2019). The programme is designed for graduates of higher institutions and non-graduates who are within the age bracket of 18-35 yeas. The programme has six categories including N-Teach, N-Health, N-Build, N-creative, N-Agro and N-Tech. However, N-Teach and N-Health are meant for graduates, who must have completed their mandatory National Youth Service Corps Programmes while N-build, N-Agro, N-Creative and N-Tech are meant for both graduates and non-graduates (Olabisi and Oboqua, 2023).

The N-power scheme was reported by Akujuru and Enyioko (2019), to have enrolled five hundred thousand Nigerian youths for its first and second batches (Batch A and B). These two batches ended their programme on the 19th of June 2020 while batch C is being assessed for enrolment (Dauda et al., 2019). Despite the praises and claims of success made by the Federal Ministry of humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development, it appears that Nigerian youths still wallow in poverty and unemployment. This is evident following the incidences that surfaced during the #ENDSARS protest in October 2020 as well as incessant attacks by bandits, insurgency by Boko haram, agitation, kidnapping and robbery by criminal elements and militancy. There is a clear indication that a good number of Nigerian youths are poor and angry with the system (Oboqua, 2021).

Empowerment is the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes (Oboqua, 2021). Empowerment refers to measures designed to increase the degree of autonomy and self

determination in people and in communities in order to enable them represent their interests in a responsible and self-determined way, acting on their own authorities. Youths need empowerment, particularly those in the rural areas who in most cases are regarded as the poorest of the poor not withstanding the role in development (Ede, 2022).

There is no generally accepted definition of youth among scholars. The definition differs slightly from scholar to scholar and from country to country as well as from concerned organization to another. However, the United Nations as cited in (UNESCO, 2021) defined youth as people that fall within the age range of 15 to 24 years. The organization further described youth as a fluid and changing group that needs to be handled with care and utmost attention. It is a period of transition from being dependent to a period which the individual is independent. UNESCO (2021), maintained that the definition as stated above is bound to change due to some circumstances such as financial, socio-cultural setting, demographic, economic, etc. In Nigeria, a youth is one between the age of 15 to 29 years (Nigeria National Youth Policy, 2019).

Youth empowerment refers to the creation of an environment for youth where they can make decision for their personal benefits as well for the benefit of the society. Youth economic empowerment refers to the ability of youths to enjoy their rights to control and benefit from resources, assets, income and their own time as well as the ability to manage risk and improve their economic status and wellbeing (UNESCO, 2015). Emejuru (2017) states that youth empowerment entails the activities that involves impartation of useful training, education etc. Such individuals acquire necessary skills that will help them survive and contribute optimally to their growth and development of their society. The author further enumerated three critical steps of empowerment to include education (impartation of life coping skills), teaching them entrepreneurial skills (exposing to them the various types of trades, occupations and professions) indoctrination (inculcating in themselves sustaining conscience). It involves restructuring of attitude and belief patterns of the young ones intending to equip them with the ability to make changes in their lives and that of others. However, Ebelechukwu, Nwokike and Nwafor, (2021)

see youth empowerment as the act of engaging and creating values so that young males and females can contribute to the economic, social and cultural advancement of their families and their nations as well as their fulfillment.

Previous governments, both military and civilian, had adopted policy measures to curtail the trend. In recent years, the governments introduced a good number of youth empowerment and skill acquisition programmes, for the unemployed who fall within the youth age bracket. Some of these programmes are government sponsored while others are privately sponsored. Examples of the youth empowerment programmes in Nigeria include; Movement for Youth Actualization International (MYAI), Lagos Digital Village (LDV), International Centre for Development Affairs (ICDA), United Nations of Youth Network Nigeria (UNYNN), Foundation for Skills Development (FSD), Youth for Technology Foundation (YTF), Diamond-Crest for Youth Education Foundation (DCYEF), Youth Entrepreneur Support Programme (YES-P), Graduate Internship Scheme (GIS). Others are Youth Initiative for Sustainable Agriculture in Nigeria (YISA), Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P), youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YEIN), Youth Empowering People (YEP), Young Entrepreneurs of Nigeria (YEN), Africa Youth Empowerment Nigeria (AYEN), Youth Empowerment and Development Initiative (YEDI) and other capacity building programmes not mentioned above are working tirelessly to reduce poverty and unemployment among youths (Odey and Sambe, 2019).

Youth empowerment implies bold and sustainable actions to advance youth's opportunities and rights, which ensures that youths can not only be heard but also participate in decision making activities in the society. Economic empowerment increases economic opportunities, access to, and advantages of better jobs. Youths' economic empowerment ensures that youths key into business climate that support the initiation and sustainability of business. Empowering youths engenders a financial sector in the nation's economy that provides access to financials services tailored to the

needs of the people, particularly youths. Empowering youth economically makes youths have assured livelihood and the ability to contribute meaningfully to the society.

The establishment of N-Power programme by the Muhammadu Buhari Government is to provide young graduates of tertiary institutions a two-year programme of temporary employment. The successful graduates are saddled with the responsibilities of addressing public service challenges in their immediate communities. These services are in the forms of providing teaching, instructional and advisory solutions in four important areas of economic development (Odey and Sambe, 2019). The study focused on N-Agro, and N-Build Programmes.

N-power Agro is the programme designed to provide services to farmers across the country. Part of the focus is to support the development of efficient farming techniques and practices to maximize productivity in the agricultural sector. The other side of the programme provides technological and institutional development to farming communities in rural areas, places where the public service sector is particularly underrepresented. By creating a stronger link between rural and urban communities and centralizing the knowledge base while incorporating local knowledge and practices, the N-power Agro Programme is built to link the diverse communities of Nigeria while promoting a modern economy (Odey and Sambe, 2019).

Agriculture is a very significant sector of the Nigeria economy. UNESCO cited in Oboqua and Ubah (2020) estimated that between 70% to 80% of the population of developing countries, including Nigeria excepting a few Latin American countries, live in rural environment. Economically, the majority of the rural population, engage in agriculture predominantly farming, fishing and herbs keeping.

Dauda (2015) asserted that agriculture which is the mainstay of our rural economy should be expanded. There is need to embark on land reforms so that, land ownership can be equitably distributed among men and women without discrimination or any form of prejudice. Bello cited in Oboqua and Ubah (2020) stated that trade and investment in agriculture, found that land and labour are major inputs used in production, by an overwhelming majority of small farmers. The need for

modern farm inputs such as fertilizers, improved seeds, plants protection chemicals, feed and mechanization equipment or tools and farming skill training, become absolutely necessary. Ekwe (2014) advocated that since agriculture is the main stay of the Nigeria economy, serious attention should be paid to agricultural skill training, for increase food production. In the same vein, Tunde (2015) noted that "agriculture involves the cultivation of land, raising and rearing of animals for the purpose of production of food for man, feed for animals, as well as raw materials for industries. It involves livestock, forestry, fishing, cropping, processing and marketing of the agricultural product (p12)".

In the same vein, Manduru (2014) explained that "in most developing countries, agriculture is both the major traditional pursuit and the key to sustained growth in the modern economy" (p3). The author further explained that "economic growth is related to agricultural progress, and that stagnation of agriculture is the principal explanation for low economic growth". Due to the importance of agriculture, Ekwe (2014) maintained that it is vital to discover the ways that can ensure increased productivity of the sector with the investment of limited time and less human resources. Oboqua and Ubah (2020) opined that outstanding researches in the field of agriculture and the employment of trained youths can ensure a substantial productivity. N-power programme especially in rural areas are involved in creating awareness in several agricultural activities such as land clearing, land tilling, planting, weeding, fertilizer as well as manure application, harvesting and food processing. They also train rural women on how to raise livestock such as chicken, sheep, turkey (Ekwe, 2014). These domestic animals produce a lot of meat for sale and consumption.

Oboqua and Ubah (2020), reported that rural youths in Biase Local Government Area were trained, on animal husbandry and food production through efficient, traditional and cost-effective methods. The authors also indicated that though the period coincided with a three months drought, the overall yield increase tremendously. Thus, there was much to eat and even to sell to bring in income. This to a great extent improved the living conditions of youths in the community.

Youth hold a vast amount of responsibility and knowledge of sustainable agriculture systems. They are vital natural resources users and managers in providing food and securing overall family welfare. Hence, there is need for them to obtain agricultural skill training for maximum production of food (Oboqua, Muoneme and Muozuba, 2021). Tunde (2015) reported that additional income that female members reap from farm work is often invested, in the schooling of their children. Similarly, Ede (2022) found that poor and vulnerable youth in rural areas revealed that, agricultural skill training for youth improves their productivity level and has a special effect on their economic empowerment and that when youths are empowered, it has a positive impact on their families, education, health and nutritional status.

The N-power Build is a training and certification programme for Nigerian youths that aims to create skilled workforce in the country. It engages 75,000 young unemployed Nigerians become skilled and competent technicians, artisans and service professionals the industries focuses on automotive, utilities, construction, building service, aluminum, gas and built environment services. N-power build programme helps fill the gap to improve the quality of vocational skills in Nigeria entrepreneur skills acquisition programme. According to Akujuru and Enyioko (2019), volunteers are deployed as apprentices training in industries, companies, workshops where their vocational skills are developed. However, these volunteers bring building solutions to underserved communities, helping the most marginalized youths of their communities to get access to the vocational skills, they need to participate in the modern workforce. As part of this programme volunteers help implement different technical, vocational and entrepreneurship skills acquisition programme in schools and tertiary institutions with a particular focus on information on automotive, utilities, construction, building services, aluminum, gas and built environment services, vocational education and other N-build information knowledge (Odey and Sambe, 2019).

Ogbu (2018) found that N-power build programme should be available to all choice of studies youth regardless of major courses and choice of studies to enhance competitive advantage, not only for students but the societies and nations where they are involved. The empowerment of

youths is now internationally accepted as a key development index which considers empowering the youth to the development of the nation (Ogbu, 2018). The importance of empowerment of youths through N-power programme cannot be over emphasized, hence the need to incorporate it in the unemployment alleviated system.

The establishment N-build programme is a youth empowerment programme by the past government of president Muhammadu Buhari was to create a database of unemployed youths and provide employment for the unemployed graduates through the internship programme. It was implemented by the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian and Disaster management to provide short employment opportunities for young unemployed Nigerians in the thirty-six states of the Federation. The beneficiaries are offered job opportunities to shappen their skills as well as enable them to gain some work experience and also be self-reliant (Ebelechukwu, Nwokike and Nwafor, 2021). The available literature on N-power programme indicated that the programme is capable of mitigating poverty and unemployment in Nigeria if the effort had been channeled towards creating an enabling equipment through the provision of basic amenities in both rural and urban area (Okeke and Ngoradi, 2017). According to World Bank as cited in (Macrotrends.net, 2021), unemployment among Nigerian youth between the ages of 15 to 24 in 2016 stood at 12.48 percent. In another study by Odey and Sambe (2019), while quoting Fitch International, asserted that Nigeria recorded her worst poverty rate in 2017, jumping from 60 percent in 2015 to 72 percent in the second quarter of 2017.

In spite of the attractive objectives of N-power Programmes, there is indication that poverty is both palpable and pervasive among most youths for whom this N-power programme claims to be the focal point of their humanitarian and social services. Moreover, most youths wallow in unemployment, illiteracy and lack of life-skills which are requisites for attaining self-employment, self-reliance as well as improved income generation. This therefore, calls for objective investigations to ascertain the geniuness, relevance, and efficacy of the objectives of N-power

Programmes (N-Agro and N-Build programmes) in Biase Local Government Area of Cross River State within the context of their claimed social intervention delivery service.

Statement of the Problem

Youths empowerment is vital as far as tackling to specify the challenges concerned. This is because of the strategic role they play in the growth of every society. The engagement of youths in empowerment programmes will help them acquire more knowledge and skills which invariably enables them take rational decisions in all walks of life and also become self-reliant to themselves and the society at large. N-power programmes was formed to address the challenges of youths 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 in Nigeria and the Biase local government area of Cross River State in particular. In Biase local government area of Cross River State, it is not known the extent N-power Programmes have contributed in tackling these challenges and hardship of daily living especially as it concerns youths.

The researcher is concerned that inspite of the claim of government and non-governmental organisations that concerted efforts had been made to alleviate poverty and improve the deplorable living condition of youths in the study area through N-power programmes, the researcher observed that most youths are still involved in banditry, kidnapping, prostitutions, secret cult, mining jobs in order to earn a living in the society. The problem of the present study is therefore, to ascertain the impact N-power Programmes on youths' empowerment in Biase Local Government Area of Cross River State?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the impact of N-power programmes on youths empowerment in Biase local government area of Cross River State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. determine the extent to which N-power Agro programme has improved youths empowerment in Biase Local Government Area of Cross River State.
2. ascertain the extent to which N-power build programme has promoted youth empowerment in Biase Local Government Area of Cross River State

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent does N-power Agro programmes improved youths empowerment in Biase Local Government Area of Cross River State?
2. To what extent does N-power build programmes improved youths empowerment in Biase Local Government Area of Cross River State?

Method

The design for this study was survey research design. According to Nworgu (2015), the survey design is the best method available to social scientists who are interested in collecting original data for the purpose of describing the population which is too large to observe directly. The population of the study was 500 youths comprising of 292 male and 208 female youths who participated in N-power programmes (Ministry of Youths and Development, 2024). There was no sampling for the study because the population was small and manageable. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "N-Power Programmes and Youths' Empowerment Questionnaire (NPPYEQ)". The instrument had 22-item questionnaire on a four-point rating scale of Very Great Extent (VGE), Great Extent (GE), Low Extent (LE) and Very Low Extent (VLE) with values of 4, 3, 2 and 1, respectively. The instrument was validated by three experts two from the Department of Continuing Education and Development Studies and one from the Department of Mathematics and Computer (Masurement and Evaluation Unit) Enugu State University of Science and Technology Agbani. Cronbach Alpha method was used to determine the reliability of

the instrument. The reliability coefficient yielded 0.81 and 0.84 which were reliable and used for the study. The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. The researcher administered the instrument on the respondents with the help of three research assistants who were briefed on the modalities of how to administer the instrument. There were 500 copies of questionnaire administered while 478 copies which represented 96.5% where retrieved and used for data analysis. The criterion mean was 2.50. This implied that mean responses of 2.50 and above showed that the responses of the respondents are to a great extent while mean responses below 2.50 showed that the responses of the respondents are to a low extent.

Results

Research Question One: To what extent does N-power agro programme improved youths empowerment in Biase Local Government Area, Cross River State?

Table 1: Mean ratings of respondents on the extent to which N-power agro programme improved youths' empowerment in Biase Local Government Area, Cross River State
N = 478

S/N	Item Statement	$\bar{x}$	SD	Decision
1	Improved my skills in poultry farming production	2.68	0.93	Great Extent
2	Improved my skills in fish production	2.71	0.84	Great Extent
3	Improved my skills in pre-planting activities	2.73	0.94	Great Extent
4	Improved my skills in post planting activities	2.55	0.97	Great Extent
5	Improved my skills in preservation and storage activities	2.71	0.96	Great Extent
6	Improved my skills in preparation of planting crops	2.92	1.04	Great Extent
7	Improved my skills in fertilizers chemical application on crops	3.07	0.81	Great Extent
8	Improved my skills in the use of modern farm tools	2.76	0.81	Great Extent
9	Improved my skills in attending workshops and seminars	2.92	0.87	Great Extent
10	Improved my skills in gardening activities	3.01	0.96	Great Extent
11	Improved my skills in pig farming production	2.83	0.73	Great Extent
	Cluster mean	2.81	0.90	Great Extent

Table 1 showed that items 1-11 had mean scores of 2.68, 2.71, 2.73, 2.55, 2.71, 2.92, 3.07, 2.76, 2.92, 3.01 and 2.83 as great extent and standard deviation of 0.93, 0.84, 0.94, 0.97, 0.96, 1.04, 0.81, 0.81, 0.87, 0.96 and 0.73 respectively. With the cluster mean of 2.81 and a standard deviation

of 0.90. This implied that N-power agro programme has greatly impacted youths' empowerment in Biase Local Government Area of Cross River State.

Research Question Two: To what extent does N-power build programmes improved youths' empowerment in Biase Local Government Area, Cross River State?

Table 2: Mean ratings of respondents on the extent to which N-power build programme improved youths' empowerment in Biase Local Government Area, Cross River State
N = 478

S/N	Item Statement	$\bar{x}$	SD	Decision
12	Improved my skills in construction	3.10	0.69	Great Extent
13	Improved my skills in building work	2.71	0.85	Great Extent
14	Improved my skill in setting of blocks in construction site	2.76	0.86	Great Extent
15	Improved my skills in laying of electrical pips in the building	2.65	0.83	Great Extent
16	Improved my skills in construction of culverts	2.47	1.22	Low Extent
17	Improved my skills in roofing of house	2.60	0.88	Great Extent
18	Improved my skills in laying planks during roofing	2.61	0.90	Great Extent
19	Improved my skills in forming building skeleton	2.74	0.83	Great Extent
20	Improved my skills in setting out building foundations	2.80	0.92	Great Extent
21	Improved my skills in installation of electrical wires	2.92	0.87	Great Extent
22	Improved my skills in installation of metres boards	2.71	0.81	Great Extent
	Cluster mean	**2.73**	**0.87**	**Great Extent**

Table 2 showed that items 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21 and 22 had mean scores of great extent as 3.10, 2.71, 2.76, 2.60, 2.61, 2.74, 2.80, 2.92, and 2.71 except item 16 with the mean score of low extent, and standard deviation of 0.69, 0.85, 0.86, 0.83, 1.22, 0.88, 0.90, 0.83, 0.92, 0.87 and 0.81. With the cluster mean of 2.73 and a standard deviation of 0.87. This implies that N-Power

build programmes has significant impact on youths' empowerment in Biase local government area of Cross River State.

Discussion of Findings

Findings from research question one showed that to a great extent that N-power agro programme impacted youths' empowerment in Biase Local Government Area of Cross River State. The significance benefits of the category is evident in the acquisition of agro-related skills for enhanced standard of living of youths. By diversifying into business activities, through the acquisition of these skills, participation is said to be economically empowered. This is in line with Olabisi and Oboqua (2023), that vocational training programmes significantly influence the empowerment of female member. Similarly, Oboqua and Ubah (2023) reported that farming skills acquisition has a positive significant influence on the empowerment of rural women. This study states that with the exposure of youths to empower agro programme, they are likely to be empowered, thus reducing restiveness in the study area.

Findings from research question two showed that to a great extent that N-power build programme impacted youths' empowerment in Biase Local Government Area of Cross River State. The significant benefits of the programmes are obvious in the acquisition of N-power build related skills for enhanced standard of living of youths. The acquisition of this skills, participation are said to be economically empowered. This is in line with Akujuru and Enyioko (2019), who stated that volunteers are deployed as apprentices training in industries, companies, workshops where their vocational skills are developed. However, these volunteers bring building solutions to underserved communities, helping the most marginalized youths of their communities to get access to the vocational skills, they need to participate in the modern workforce.

Conclusion

In view of the findings of this study, it was concluded that to a great extent, N-power agro and N-power build programmes have significantly impacted on youths empowerment in Biase Local Government Area of Cross River State.

Recommendations

From the findings of the study, the following recommendation were made:

1. More youth should be involved in agricultural programmes in order to improve food security.
2. Government should ensure timely release of fund for the procurement of modern farm tools required in promoting agricultural activities.

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