MKAR JOURNAL OF ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT VOL.1 NO.1 2022.

ISSN 3043-5110 journals.umm.edu.ng

Impact and Challenges of N-Power Scheme (2016-2018) in Ibadan North Local Government Area, Oyo State, Nigeria

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Abstract
Npower is an empowerment scheme implemented to address the prevalent youth unemployment and restiveness as well as to alleviate poverty. The study was conducted in Ibadan North Local Government of Oyo State to examine the impacts and challenges of the Npower scheme on the beneficiaries. The theoretical framework adopted for the study is Structural Functionalism. A total of 250 Npower beneficiaries were selected through purposive sampling technique; however, the analysis was based on 249 questionnaires retrieved and validated. Statistical Package for Social Sciences, version 25 was used in the analysis of data and presented in frequency tables and simple percentages. Findings revealed that the programme had a relative impact on the beneficiaries' livelihoods, including the provision of easy access to basic daily needs, catering for relatives, and the ability to enrol for further studies. Findings revealed that delays in payments, and lack of continuity, among others, were challenges associated with the programme. Therefore, the study recommends continuity of the programme by successive governments and quick payments of monthly stipends, among other.

Keywords: Beneficiaries, Empowerment, Livelihoods, Npower, Programme, Youth

Introduction

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and ranked seventh in the world, with over 60% population under the age of 25 (World Population Review, 2020). Nigeria has the largest economy in Africa, ranked 138th in the world based on her nominal Gross Domestic Product 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, the socioeconomic livelihoods of the Nigerian people, particularly the youth, is a significant challenge, evidenced by yearly increased unemployment rates. According to Anyanwu (2017), a high level of unemployment and underemployment is one of the critical socio-economic

problems facing Nigerian youths, causing a magnitude of poverty in the country. Nigeria, as a nation, was ranked among the poorest nations on the human development index by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2019).

The UNDP (2019) reported that the proportion of multidimensionally poor people in Nigeria has remained constant at just over 50% over the past decade (up to 2017). Accordingly, the actual number of multidimensionally poor people increased from 86 million to 98 million over the same period. Also, important to note from the report is the increase in the significant proportion of Nigerians (51%) who are multidimensionally poor compared to others in developing countries (46%). In Nigeria, there are inequalities in the distribution of resources and deprivations are experienced by Nigerian people in accessing clean water, sanitation, adequate nutrition and 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 significantly affected by unemployment, hence failing to secure suitable socio-economic livelihoods. Anyanwu (2017) revealed that young people are seen doing jobs of low quality, working long hours for low wages, engaging in dangerous work, receiving only short-term and being found in informal employment arrangements or unemployed.

Previous and 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 youth. Some of these programmes include National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), and Better Life for Rural Women, to mention a few. Dike (2012) asserted that most of these programmes, by their contents, were very laudable. However, their implementation strategies were window dressing and cosmetic in nature, especially as their impacts did not reduce poverty and graduate unemployment and improve the living standard of people in the country. The poverty rate in over half of 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.

The poor performance of the previous empowerment programmes, the burning nature of youth unemployment, the increased rates of poverty and the pronounced social exclusion of the youths encouraged the administration of the Muhammad Buhari-led government to institute National Social Investments Programme (N-SIP). Npower is a branch of the N-SIP, implemented and coordinated to address the country's socio-economic challenges. N-Power is a platform for promoting the social inclusion of the youth to boost the economy by preparing young Nigerians for a knowledge economy equipped with world-class skills and certification, making them innovators and movers in the domestic and global markets. The Npower programme is also aimed at producing a pool of software developers, hardware service professionals, animators, graphic artists, building services professionals, artisans and others. N-Power also provides non-graduates relevant technical and business skills that enhance their work and livelihoods (Eminue, 2015).

The initial modular programmes in N-Power are designed for Nigerian citizens between 18 and 35 years. Applicants must meet the minimum requirements (if any) for their respective programmes. Generally, the selection was based on applicants' expression of a genuine interest in whichever area they decide, passing the relevant tests, willingness to push beyond their comfort zones and ability to show a flair to develop all the skills they need to be the best they can be (N-Power Programme, 2016). The programme was expected to provide employment opportunities for 500,000 graduates in four key areas, including NTeach (teachers), NAgro (agriculture extension advisers), NHealth (healthcare assistants), and NTax (community tax liaison officers). It also aimed to recruit 100,000 software developers, hardware service professionals, animators, graphic artists, building services professionals and artisans (N-Power Programme, 2016).

The fact remains that social exclusion is connected with poverty, youth unemployment, and other social problems in the country. N-Power set to address this challenge 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 to better the lives of the citizens. The modular programmes under N-Power ensure that each beneficiary learns and practices most of what is necessary to find or create work (Adetayo, 2017). Accordingly, several alleviation programmes have been reported to fail in reaching their targets, actualising their purpose, fraught with corruption, technical and personnel challenges, and rendering them useless in serving the purposes for their creation. Against this stated background, the researcher embarked on the study to assess the project's impact and identify the possible challenges that might burden the beneficiaries and the programme's success.

Statement of the Research Problem

There are several challenges facing developing countries, to which Nigeria is not exempt. This ranges from poverty, youth unemployment and general exclusion of youth in the social and economic processes. These challenges impede the satisfactory socio-economic livelihoods of Nigerian youth. According to Aliyu (2012), most of the youths in Nigeria are averagely poor and lack access to basic needs. Oladeji and Abiola (2016) affirmed that poverty is a feature of every state in Nigeria. The story is not different in Oyo State where many youths are jobless after spending years in higher institutions, exhibit poor lifestyles and find it challenging to meet up with basic needs. Some skillful youths find it difficult to attain and sustain comfortable livelihoods. The announcement of the implementation of Npower was seen as a relief by the target groups, who considered it an antidote to viable socio-economic livelihoods. Oladeji and Abiola (2016) asserted that the high incidence of poverty in the country has made poverty alleviation strategies such as Npower an important policy option.

Several studies (Obadan, 2016; Ogwumike, 2017; Ugoh & Ukpere, 2016) have shown that many empowerment programmes implemented to combat youth restiveness, unemployment and poverty and to promote social inclusion have not adequately had so much impact on the targets (beneficiaries) and the development of the country. Gaps are also observed that the challenges hindering the success of these programmes have not been adequately addressed. The failure to identify and address those gaps can inhibit the efforts of various governments in developing the country through efficient and effective policies. It is

evident from several studies that poverty reduction strategies in Nigeria have failed to achieve their stated objectives (Nwuke, 2014; Osagie, 2007; Ugoh & Ukpere, 2016). It is on this observation that this study became imperative to examine the impact of Npower and the challenges that could inhibit its aim and objectives. Npower, as a relatively young empowerment programme is yet to be explored by many researchers. This is one of the gaps this study intends to bridge. Embarking on an empirical study of this nature is integral to assessing the level of governmental support and efforts towards poverty alleviation. It is against this statement that the researcher decided to assess the impact of the Npower programme on the socio-economic livelihoods of the beneficiaries and identify challenges associated with the implementation of the programme in Ibadan North Local Government Area of Oyo State, Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework: Structural Functionalist Theory

Structural Functionalism, which has its roots in the works and contributions of Auguste Comte (organicism), Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim, Talcott Parsons, Malinowski, and Radcliffe Brown, is adopted for this study. This analytical framework sees the system as a structure with some functions (including distributive function) to carry out. 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 and religion). 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. By implication, Npower is one of the social structures that could be used in stabilising society through its positive impact on members of society if well implemented. It is expected that the programme could be used to improve the lives of individuals which can as well translate to social order. Furthermore, the positive impact of the programme on beneficiaries would promote good behaviour that will advance stability in the study area.

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 disharmony or instability of the various institutions in the country. It is assumed that failure of the political system to operate within expectation may lead to increased unemployment rates. 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 behaviour. 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 applies to the phenomenon under study because it identifies the N-Power programme as a component 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 will likely significantly impact individuals' economic and social lives. The impact can be felt in the skills provided to make the beneficiaries useful

to themselves and society. This implies that when an individual is empowered, his household becomes empowered, making it possible to provide food for the family and help stabilise the family institution. Again, the stability in the family institution will positively affect other institutions like legal, political, economic, religious, education, and health, among others. This is because of the social elements of interconnectedness, interrelatedness and interdependence. This will, therefore, help to prevent all sorts of criminality like rape, armed robbery, murder, alcoholism, drug abuse and human trafficking, among others.

The theory's ability to explain the impact and the problems affecting the implementation of the Npower programme does not mean that it is free from criticism. The theory claims that the scheme is for vulnerable individuals, but the reverse is the case, as individuals working 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 of being inadequate in explaining the phenomenon under study. The officials of the scheme embezzle the resources earmarked for the programme. This implies that the scheme's purposes were defeated, and in solving a particular problem, more problems emanated. In other words, the theory cannot holistically solve all human problems.

Literature Review

Impact of Npower on the Socio-economic Livelihoods of the Beneficiaries

In making the social and economic livelihoods of Nigerian graduate stable and healthy, the 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 every society's social, economic and political activities, the phenomenon remains a concern that must be checked and addressed by all critical stakeholders. This will mean identifying and developing a practical policy framework within international, national, and local resources for the benefit of all citizens, especially the poor. According to Muhammed (2018), the N-power programme has greatly impacted Nigerian youths' social and economic livelihoods. In buttressing this, 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 Programmes of the Buhari Government. As Jude (2017) noted, the figure represents a nearly 70% success rate in implementing the programme. He added that besides the 6.8 million direct beneficiaries, 1.75 million persons comprising cooks, farmers, and 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 participated 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 electronic devices. While most 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 registration process. Adetayo (2017) noted that the volunteers were 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 10,000 artisans who were verified, supplied with toolboxes for three months of 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 term.

If executed properly, this N-Power job creation initiative will be one of the best things this present administration will have implemented. Jude (2017) affirms that the newly launched jobs portal of the Federal Government, "npower.gov.ng," recorded over 400,000 successful registrations when it was initially opened for submissions on Sunday, June 12, 2016. He commended the governments and social media's efforts for the tremendous power of accountability and the successful registration of registrants. Affirming the extent to which N-power had impacted 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 their socio-economic livelihoods. He also agrees that the programme has greatly affected their lifestyles and changed their status. The survey by Jude (2017) corroborates the above statement by highlighting how the N-power programme has economic and social benefits to individuals and society at large. He opines that with N30,000 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 many challenges. Therefore, the N-Power programme is not without challenges. The programme has recorded some achievements in food crop production, agricultural and industrial extension services, primary health care, education enrolment, mass transit, 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 their strategies (Bolaji, 2014). Many factors have contributed to the failure and efforts of past empowerment programmes, the N-Power programme inclusive. Bolaji (2014) identified a lack of targeting mechanisms for the poor and that most programmes do not focus directly on the poor. He further posited that political and policy instability has resulted in frequent policy changes and inconsistent implementation, preventing continuous progress in poverty reduction programmes.

Scholars have found a relationship between the 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 activities with resultant duplication of effort and inefficient use of limited resources. This means overlapping functions ultimately lead to institutional rivalry and conflicts that affect programmes. They further observed that severe budgetary, management and governance problems had afflicted most of the programmes, resulting in incomplete facilities, broken down and abandoned,

unstaffed and equipped. Poverty-related programmes lack accountability and transparency, making the programmes 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 challenge is associated with many poverty reduction programmes and the N-Power project. The ministries and agencies that are 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 it also continued to spread and deepen poverty, unemployment and other social problems. Hence, the country's development 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 the government's empowerment programme in Nigeria will rely on its implementation stage, which, according to Sapru (2018), is critical in managing cost and time and solving the policy problem of unemployment itself. It is also observed that the implementation stage in the policy process usually remains challenging, complex and critical. It involves interactions among people, government agencies and their activities, with each group having its political interest.

N-Power beneficiaries have complained that the stipends remunerated by the Federal Government are not consistent as expected (Lawal, 2017). Accordingly, the investigation shows that many beneficiaries were not paid their monthly stipends even though they were duly registered, mobilized for their posts and regularly attended their place of primary assignments (PPAs). Lawal (2017) buttresses several challenges associated with the programme, including unmatched names and technical issues based on the complaints received from beneficiaries. This problem was experienced in States like Kwara, Borno, and Lagos, among others. The fact that the N-Power project is a programme for the masses is not distant from challenges in implementation and achieving its aim and objectives. The issue of corruption among the officials, poor implementation, lack of targeting mechanisms, and political and policy instability, among others, affect the purpose of the N-Power scheme. It is still pertinent that the problems identified can easily be solved; thereby, the programme's challenges can still be remedied.

Methodology

The study was conducted in Ibadan North Local Government Area of Oyo State, Nigeria. The target population included all engaged beneficiaries of the N-Power programme during the periods of 2016 and 2019, posted to the study area. The inclusion of the beneficiaries was to provide an adequate impact assessment of the programme and to give rich, detailed and valid information concerning the programme. The data for the study was primarily sourced directly from the respondents by the researcher using a questionnaire. This was done to give the researcher first-hand experience by being an active participant, collecting what was

relevant to the study and making the researcher control how and where information was to be collected.

The study adopted a purposive sampling technique to select 250 beneficiaries (respondents) of the programme. The technique was employed to ensure the actual selection of the beneficiaries. The data collection instrument for the study was a semi-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 possible, the close-ended questions. The questionnaire format was also aligned with the study objectives and respondents' socio-demographic data. 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 and 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 distribution of respondents on sex, 66% were males, while 34% were females. This implies that the number

of males participating in this study was more than the female counterpart, even though the latter respondents were also significant. Therefore, 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 their female counterparts. The age distribution shows that 6% of respondents were from 18-23 years, 64% from 24-29 years, and 30% from 30-35 years. This implies that most of the respondents were between the ages of 24-29 which directly signifies that the target of the programme was 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 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 were divorced, separated and widowed. This, therefore, means that most of the respondents who participated in this study were single, which may be in connection with the fact that they were young graduates still looking for greener pastures. More so, the majority of the respondent's marital status may also be associated 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 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%) and artisanship (13%) to being contract staff (10%), (27%) were not involved in any occupational activities apart from the empowerment scheme. This shows that the scheme is lenient and simple and gives room for personal improvement.

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

Variables/Statements	Response	Frequency	Percentage
The extent to which beneficiaries could attend to daily needs without difficulty	Very Capable	127	51
	Fairly Capable	89	36
	Incapable	33	13
	Total	**249**	**100**
The extent to which beneficiaries could cater for family needs through the stipends collected	Very Easy	103	41
	Fairly Easy	124	50
	Not Easy	22	9
	Total	**249**	**100**
Additional educational certifications were acquired 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**
The impact of the	Yes	222	89

programme on the growth of the beneficiaries.	No No Response	19 8	8 3
	Total	**249**	**100**
The extent to which the programme has reduced the rate of graduate unemployment in the area.	Highly reduced Fairly Reduced Not Reduced	129 85 35	52 34 14
	Total	**249**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2020

Table 2 reveals how the programme has impacted the beneficiaries' socio-economic livelihoods. More than 50% of the respondents claimed that their inclusion in the scheme enabled them to cater for their daily needs without difficulty. This explicates that the scheme has been helpful and elevated the beneficiaries from the poverty line, enabling them to eat at least three-square meals and buy and pay for essential things. The responses of 41% affirm that it was effortless to cater for the needs of the family members through the stipends collected, while 50% conceived it to be fairly easy; however, 14% found it uneasy. This implies that most of the scheme's beneficiaries in the study area could attend to their family members' economic, social and psychological needs. This probably also means that their selection has made them responsible for feeding the family members and paying their children's school fees (among the married ones).

The monthly stipends paid to the beneficiaries were used to uplift their status, including studying further. In corroboration, 60% of respondents agreed to the plan to study further from the stipends received, 8% already had finished further studies, including Post-Graduate Diploma in Education for the HND beneficiaries, M.Sc. 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 with 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 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% of respondents considered themselves achievers for the positive impact of the scheme. The respondents' views show that Npower has enormously impacted their socio-economic livelihoods. This also implies that the scheme has impacted not only 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 graduate unemployment rate in the study area, as against 34% who felt the reduction was only fair. However, 14% observed no difference in the programme implementation and a decrease in graduate unemployment. It can be concluded that the Npower programme is a relative antidote for graduate unemployment. The empowerment of the beneficiaries through starting up of businesses and skills acquisition would make them engage 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 literacy level in the study area through the N-Teach arm. This is probably due to teaching students, especially primary school pupils, how to read and write. Furthermore, it implies that the N-teach arm has served as an added advantage to the state's educational system through increased teaching and manpower. Also, the 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 majority's views show that the beneficiaries' involvement in the programme's agricultural arm would facilitate interaction between them and farmers on how to boost their farm produce and acquire skills that will ultimately lead to business start-ups. This implies that the continuity of the programme and the inclusion of a high number of Nigerians will help sustain the development goals and contribute to Nigeria's educational and socio-economic developments.

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

Variables/Statements	Response	Frequency	Percentage
Commensuration of the stipends to the expected work/task.	Highly Commensurate Poorly Commensurate Not commensurate	25 85 139	10 34 56
	Total	**249**	**100**
Level of programme supervision by government officials.	Well supervised Poorly supervised No Idea	74 168 7	30 67 3
	Total	**249**	**100**
Level of corruption among the officials of the programme**.**	None High Moderate Low	13 131 79 26	5 53 32 10
	Total	**249**	**100**
Rate of political interference in the selection of beneficiaries	No Interference Yes, and High Yes, but Medium Yes, but Low	34 22 64 128	14 9 26 51
	Total	**249**	**100**
Experience delay in terms of the payment of the monthly stipends.	Yes No No Response	241 5 3	97 2 1
	Total	**249**	**100**
The selection of the beneficiaries into the programme reflects the projected targets (unemployed/vulnerable youths).	Yes No No idea	137 89 23	55 36 9
	Total	**249**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2020

Table 3 shows the challenges associated with the Npower scheme, which similarly affect the beneficiaries' experience in discharging 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 and CBN, multiple roles played by beneficiaries, and high handedness surrounding

bureaucratic organisations unfamiliar to those who have not previously been employed. In line with this, 86% affirmed that they were gripped with fears over the 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 reported daily on local newspapers and online media platforms.

Table 3 also revealed that the programme was poorly supervised by the views of 67% of respondents, even though 30% claimed it was well supervised. This is in tandem with truancy, irregularity, and nonchalant attitudes towards work which sometimes were exhibited by some beneficiaries without any query or punishment from the scheme officials. Another justification is the multiple workings of beneficiaries in different places simultaneously, including Federal, State and Local Government parastatals and 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 meet the scheme's target and achieve its goals sufficiently. The corruption may appear in the forms of bribery, selecting already employed youths against vulnerable ones, and demanding unnecessary dues from the beneficiaries, among others.

Table 3 shows that the selection of beneficiaries has little political influence. Based on this assertion, 51% of respondents agreed that there was political interference but very low compared to 14% who 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. Political interference was also observed by 9% and 26% of 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 had experienced delays in the payments of the monthly stipends, which may probably be linked to technical issues, poor management and unperturbed attitudes towards the welfare of the beneficiaries. The last question on the table asked if the programme's beneficiaries were the target (unemployed/vulnerable youths) as projected. More than 50% of them concurred to have been the real targets. However, a few respondents' responses showed that some already employed and unqualified individuals 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 qualified applicants and void the selection processes and targets.

Discussion of Findings

The discussion of findings is done in line with the study's objectives. Findings on the first objective (to assess the impact of the Npower programme on the socio-economic livelihoods of the beneficiaries) revealed that the programme has relatively impacted the socio-economic lives of the beneficiaries through the 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 could enrol for and complete further studies (MSc, PGDE, Professional Diplomas, among others), while some planned to enrol through the monthly stipends of thirty thousand naira.

Findings revealed that the programme had reduced graduate unemployment to a considerable extent through the skills gained and stipends saved by the beneficiaries to start up personal businesses and employ others. The findings are supported by Jude (2017), who revealed that some beneficiaries without a job before their selection or with meagre salaries from their previous engagements had glorified the programme for positively impacting their socio-economic livelihoods and changing their lifestyles. This study also revealed that the programme's N-Teach arm has greatly impacted the educational system in the state by doubling and expanding the teaching manpower, increasing the literacy level through adequate teaching and increasing the enrolment of pupils. Findings revealed that most of the beneficiaries considered themselves great achievers for the benefits gained and the influence it had on their socio-economic lives. Jude (2017) affirmed that the N30,000 monthly stipends given to beneficiaries had economic and social benefits to individuals and society, emphasising that the scheme had at least empowered beneficiaries to meet basic needs.

The findings of the second objective (to identify challenges associated with implementing the Npower programme through the beneficiaries) revealed that the stipends were not commensurate with 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, a hike in the transport fare, and poor working conditions, among others. This probably requires that the government step up to increase the stipends to enable the beneficiaries to discharge their duties accordingly. Lawal (2017) affirmed the study's findings by emphasising that N-Power beneficiaries complained that the stipends remunerated by the Federal Government were not consistent as expected. His investigation also revealed that many 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 in the 2019 general elections, especially if won by another party. This aligns with the fact that the scheme is important in the lives of the beneficiaries. More so, it corroborates with the technical issues associated with payment delays, corruption among officials, and poor supervision. Based on this, Bolaji (2014) discovered that political and policy instability has resulted in frequent policy changes and inconsistent implementation, which have prevented continuity and continuous progress in poverty reduction programmes. In affirmation, Okoroma (2016), Dlakwa (2018) and Sapru (2018) also found a relationship between the 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. It is important to state that the challenges could affect the effectiveness of the programme as they contributed to the nonchalant attitudes of the beneficiaries towards the responsibilities given to them. Evidence showed that some of the beneficiaries abandoned their official primary assignments for

personal assignments, resumed late to the workplace and failed to adequately follow guidelines as instructed by their heads.

Findings also revealed that political influence in selecting beneficiaries existed but at a minimal level. The selection of the majority from the lower class affirmed that affiliation with political parties or politicians played a minimal role in becoming beneficiaries of the programme. Findings also revealed that the target mechanism of the programme was adequate in selecting and identifying the actual targets (vulnerable youths/unemployed graduates). However, it was noted that there were still lapses in the target mechanisms, particularly the selection of already established and employed graduates 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 limit the chance of qualified applicants and void the selection processes and targets.

Theoretically, Structural Functionalism shows that a harmonious relationship among all system parts would develop the state and the country. This is proved by the roles played by the beneficiaries through an increase in the teaching workforce and farm produce, among others. This will ultimately develop the educational sector, thereby reducing illiteracy rates, increasing the enrolment of children in schools and increasing food surplus, and sustaining developmental goals. Successful implementation and coordination of the programme will impact the discharge of the functions assigned to the beneficiaries. Where there are bridges (delay in payment and corruption, among others), playing roles may become challenging. Where the programme positively impacts the beneficiaries, it will reflect on various institutions in the country, including health, agriculture, law, family, economy, school, and transportation, among others. On health, beneficiaries will find it easy to access health facilities, hence, capable of increasing life expectancy and reducing mortality and morbidity rates. Start-up businesses to boost the economy and reduced unemployment, poverty and crime rates will emerge and sustain development. Furthermore, beneficiaries and their associates may have stable families devoid of domestic violence because they can provide basic necessities. All of these will uphold morals and provide 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

Npower has, to some extent, impacted the socio-economic lives of the beneficiaries in the study by providing a significant number of them with adequate skills and training, and various forms of assistance apart from loans which needed to be reviewed. To a large extent, the beneficiaries 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, and provision of food security, which may ultimately result in the country's development. However, the implementation of the programme has been

fraught with challenges which had negatively affected the effectiveness of the programme as well as its impact on the socioeconomic lives of the beneficiaries. Thus, it is concluded that Npower is a reasonably relatively good programme for stabilising the socioeconomic activities of the country through its positive impact on the lives of the beneficiaries, although not free from challenges.

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 the 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 put forward;

i. The successive government should sustain and continue the programme to take many youths out of poverty.
ii. By working with other relevant stakeholders, well-trained computer experts should be employed to avert the problem of payment delays to beneficiaries.
iii. The new minimum wage should reflect the stipends given to the beneficiaries to carry out their duties with commitment and diligence.
iv. More efforts should be intensified by the programme's officials 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 the Npower project and other poverty alleviation programmes, especially in human development, to liberate the masses from servitude.
vi. Young Nigerians should be trained to possess skills congruent with the real labour market demands, which will be very helpful after being permanently disengaged from the programme.
vii. Beneficiaries should be contented with stipends paid and try to invest by rearing animals and starting petty businesses, among others. They should not see the programme as a right or entitlement, but a privilege given to improve personal skills and contribute their quota to the development of their communities.

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