

# National Youth Empowerment Programme and Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria, 2015-2019

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**Abstract:** *Youth unemployment and poverty have been twin evils bedeviling the Nigerian economy and society generally. As a result of the ravaging effects of these two monsters successive Nigerian governments have adopted different youth poverty alleviation programmes without stemming the challenges of unemployment and poverty amongst young people in Nigeria. Hence, our interests in examining of the national youth empowerment programme and poverty alleviation in Nigeria N-Power with particular focus on the Buhari Administration 2015-2019. The broad objective of the study was to investigate the national youth empowerment programme and the reduction of poverty in Nigeria under Buhari administration 2015-2019. Secondary data source collection was adopted for the study. Incrementalism theory was adopted as its theoretical framework of analysis. The study found among others that, the major problem of past poverty alleviation and youth empowerment programmes in Nigeria was policy discontinuation, which is policy inconsistency as no administration continued with the policy/programmes of past administration. The study recommends among others that, there is the need for federal government to consolidate the N-Power scheme, since the creation of the programme was borne out of the need to empower the Nigerian youths and save them from the dangers of unemployment.*

**Keywords:** Youth, Poverty, Empowerment, Poverty Alleviation, N-Power.

## Introduction

Youth empowerment, poverty and poverty alleviation has become a globalized concepts and of major concern for development experts and international donor agencies. This is because of the threats they pose to humanity world over. To reduce the poverty rate amongst the youths, the Nigerian governments see the need to take drastic measures. Since 70 percent of Nigeria's population lives in absolute poverty, eradicating poverty is one of the most difficult challenges the country faces today (Soludo, 2005:11). Greater percentage of the country's population is living in the rural areas and youth unemployment by geographical or settlement location (rural or urban areas) indicates that youth unemployment is mostly in rural areas. It does not mean that youth unemployment is not prevalent in the urban areas. Research has shown that poverty and unemployment are twin evils bedeviling the Nigeria state today. Reports from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2005) shows how the "population in poverty has maintained a steady increase from 17.7 million in 1988 to 66.7 million in 2004." In 2010, the NBS reported that 60.9% of Nigerians were living in poverty. The world poverty clock in 2018 stated that Nigeria assumed the ignoble position of being the poverty capital of the world after overtaking India, with about 86.9 million of her population in extreme poverty (Vanguard, 2019). More than half of the country's young people are unemployed, according to the NBS 2012 National Baseline Survey, which supports this claim.

However, youth unemployment, poverty and poverty alleviation is not peculiar to Nigeria nation alone, it is a global phenomenon. It affects citizens especially the youth of different countries and continents with varying degrees of responses by their leadership. It is a global concept because of the threats it poses to world peace and security. Unemployment and youth empowerment indeed has become a major concern for development experts and international donor agencies. The United Nations got concerned about this monster destroying the majority of people in the world because of its persistence and aggravation, despite programmes aimed to alleviate it by various countries of the world.

The National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) was established by the administration of former President Olesegun Aremu Obasanjo (1999–2007) to combat poverty. NAPEP was founded in 2010 as the main federal government agency to end extreme poverty in Nigeria, (Anyebe, 2015). The core programme under the scheme includes the Youth Empowerment Scheme and National Resource development and Conservation Scheme. The author further disclosed that despite the huge financial implication of the schemes, poverty and youth unemployment continued unabated.

Another signature poverty eradication scheme was the Subsidy Reinvestment Scheme (SURE-P) and Youth Enterprises with Innovation in Nigeria (YOUWIN), was initiated and carried out by the Goodluck Jonathan administration (2012-2014). Regarding poverty reduction, the primary SURE-P programme features the Mass Transit Programme, Vocational Training Programme, Community Service/ Women and Youth Employment (CSWYE). These initiatives have been criticized several times for lack of transparency, and large scale corruption. Abu (2015) in a study on Subsidy Reinvestment Programme and Employment Generation in Nigeria (2012-2014) concluded that the programme has not led to employment generation in Nigeria. Youth unemployment and widespread poverty continued in the country.

Then, the Government of President Muhammadu Buhari designed the ongoing National Social Investment Scheme (NSIP) as a strategy to combat poverty and unemployment. One of the programmes is the N-power programme which is designed to assist young Nigerians between the ages of 18 to 35 to acquire and develop life-long skills for becoming change makers in their communities and players in the domestic and global markets. Since 2016, these programmes have supported more than 7.8 million direct and 1.5 million indirect beneficiaries country-wide through a fair and transparent process supported by the Ministry of Budget and National Planning (MBNP) Okuku, (2018). By providing a framework for extensive and pertinent work skill learning and development, N-Power addresses the issue of youth unemployment while also connecting its basic principles and results to improving deficient public services and igniting a larger economy.

The NSIP programme was developed to help citizens escape the twin evils of poverty and unemployment, as previously mentioned, by fostering ability, making investments, and providing direct cash assistance. The programme has four key components: Job Creation and Youth Empowerment (N-Power), the National Homegrown School Lunch Programme (NHGSFP), the National Cash Transfer Programme (NCTP), and State-owned Enterprises and Empowerment Programme (GEEP). By giving access to targeted funding, NSIP generally aims to increase the income and standard of living for the poor and vulnerable households, thereby enhancing their capacity to withstand economic shock. The Federal Government of Nigeria's employability and improvement initiative, known as the N-Power plan, aims to instill the learn-work enterprise culture among young people between the ages of 18 and 35 (N-SIP, 2018). The programme is available for graduate and non-graduates. The graduate's category is further divided into three areas namely, the N-Teach, N-Health and N-Agro. For the non-graduate group, the N-Build Scheme is designed to give its recipients the essential and valuable skills to be self-employed.

More than half of Nigeria's population is under the age of 35, and available data from the Federal Bureau of Statistics and the National Population Commission from 2013 and 2016 show that a sizable portion of this population is unemployed while a sizable portion of the youth is still underemployed (Awogbenle and Iwuamadi, 2010; National Population Commission, 2013; Federal Bureau of Statistics, 2016). The World Bank (2016) estimated that Nigeria's youth unemployment rate was around 38%. Disempowerment and unemployment both seem to be linked to poverty, suggesting a connection between the two ideas. Thus, unemployment has posed serious threat to social and economic stability and appears to be contributing to the high poverty rate in the nation (Kabeer, 2003; ILO, 2012; Ajufu, 2013; DFID, 2017).

The Federal Government of Nigeria launched a strategy plan for job creation and youth empowerment in 2016 in response to the pervasive state of unemployment and its alleged link to poverty and disempowerment (DFID, 2017; N-Power Information Guide, 2017). In general, the programme's framework identified four important growth sectors with the potential to generate significant employment possibilities. These sectors are agriculture, information and communication technology (ICT), construction, agribusiness and agro-allied industries, wholesale and retail trade. Three main strands, N-power, Skills Acquisition, and Innovation Hubs, look to constitute the foundation for the framework's deployment starting in the first quarter of 2016 (DFID, 2017).

A national social investment programme called N-power was established by the federal government with the express purpose of empowering young people and creating jobs. Increasing the human capital of the Nigerian labour force was essentially one of the programme's goals (N-Power Information Guide, 2017). Increasing human capital seems to be in the area of youth employment that youth empowerment should address. The development of young people's skills in vital fields including agriculture, health care, and education was to assure youth empowerment. The primary goal of the programme appears to be the development of the skills of Nigerian youth, both educated and uneducated, who had little chance of finding employment, even at the minimum level required to survive or raise a family (Okoro and Bassey, 2018; N-Power Information Guide 2017). The initiative was also created to help close the teacher shortage in primary schools and to help provide basic education to children in rural areas, especially those in underprivileged groups. In addition, the program was created to provide human resources to primary health centers in communities that appear to be understaffed, as well as agricultural labour (Okoro and Bassey, 2018).

There haven't been many researches done to evaluate how the programme has affected youth empowerment. In a study, Abin (2018) examined how the N-Power Programme was implemented and how its effects on beneficiaries' socio-economic wellbeing in Akwanga Metropolis, Nasarawa state. According to the study, N-Power improved the beneficiaries' financial, material, and social well-being. However, the study disregarded the research area, which turns into one of the holes that this study aims to fill.

A study conducted by Okoro and Bassey (2018) also examined Competence and Resource use among N-Power Teachers: Implications for Efficient and Effective Instruction in Nigerian Primary and Secondary Schools. The study neglected the programme's impact to youth empowerment, which is another gap this study seeks to fill, and was solely focused on the N-Teach component of the program and reliant on beneficiary competence in terms of teacher education.

Before the emergence of N-Power the Buhari administration aims to empower and train the Nigerian youths ages 18-35 years, previous Nigerian administration from 1999, has had programmes for empowering young people, whose aims were to empower the

youth and reduce the level of poverty amongst the Nigerian youth to the barest minimum, this programme was designed to empower Nigerian youth entrepreneurs ages 18-35 years. These young Nigerians are given a stipend of N30,000 monthly. 200,000 previously unemployed Nigerian graduates were deployed in 2016 and are receiving their N30,000 monthly stipends as they serve in their various place of primary assignments (PPA) in Nigerian communities in different capacities including as Teaching Assistants, Agric extension aides or community health workers.

Another batch of 300,000 beneficiaries were deployed on the 1st of August, 2018 while 20,000 more beneficiaries in the non-graduate category have commenced training in thirty-four states of the Federation. The N-power scheme presently provides jobs to the 500, 000 previously unemployed graduates and trains 100, 000 non-graduates as artisans with eight technology hubs.

There have been past poverty alleviation and youth empowerment programmes in Nigeria. They come with different administrations and different nomenclatures. This policy and programme discontinuation makes it a tradition in Nigeria that no government continues with the policy/programmes of the past administration, but creates a new programme to boost the ego of his/her administration. The immediate past youth empowerment and poverty alleviation programme in Nigeria before the Buhari's N-Power programme, was Youth Enterprises with Innovation in Nigeria (YOUWIN), in Goodluck Jonathan administration 2011-2015, with the intention to empower 80, 000 Nigerian youths entrepreneurs ages 18-45 years.

The Buhari regime that took over power from Jonathan administration terminated the life of YOUWIN, programme and introduced the N-Power for youth empowerment of ages 18-35 years. But before the elimination of the programme by the Buhari regime, Youth Enterprises with Innovation in Nigeria (YOUWIN), it would be recalled that YOUWIN was a national business plan competition run by the Nigerian government to empower her youth, encourage enterprise, help grow small business and create jobs. This was the same agenda and intentions of the President Buhari administration in establishing the on-going N-Power programme.

The modular programmes under N-Power ensure that each participant will learn and put into practice the majority of the skills required to obtain or create job. The N-Power Volunteer Corp entails the widespread deployment of 500,000 trained recent graduates to help address the shortcomings in our public services for health, education, and civic engagement. Some of these graduates will also aid in bringing Nigeria's strategic and economic goals of achieving food security and self-sufficiency to fruition.

N-Power is providing young Nigerians with the training and credentials they need to succeed in the information economy, enabling them to innovate and move markets both at home and abroad. As a result of the N-Power programme, we would have a pool of software developers, hardware service professionals, and animators, graphic artists, building services professionals, craftspeople, and others. N-Power also places a strong emphasis on educating non-graduates in pertinent technical and business skills that improve their prospects for employment and standard of living. According to Olawole (2018:4), goals of the programme includes; reducing the rate of unemployment in Nigeria, facilitate the transfer of entrepreneurial, technical skills and employability ability and to bring solution active public service and government diversification policy. The programme is divided into three components viz, n-tech, n-health, and n-agro as well as other subsidiary non-graduate scheme as n-build, n-knowledge and n-teach respectively. However, the relationship between empowerment and poverty alleviation has been established, such that empowerment is now internationally accepted as a key development and poverty alleviation index.

It is impossible to overstate how important empowerment is because it is a fundamental human right, which is why the N-Power programme must be included in the system for reducing unemployment. The percentage of young people without jobs in rural areas rose from 47.59 percent to 59.95 percent between 2011 and 2017. In rural areas, the number of young people without jobs increased from 2.9 million in 2010 to around 5.9 million in 2016. Finance, a lack of effective administration and implementation, inconsistent policies, unimpressive responses from prospective trainees, and unqualified resource personnel managing the training programmes are just a few of the issues that public policies intended to address youth unemployment have faced.

The programmes launched in the 1980s that were intended to be successful but fell short of expectations have not much improved over time, despite changes. The National Accelerated Poverty Alleviation Programme (NAPEP), for instance, grew over time to be too large for its small fiscal allotment. The programme's impact was limited since a large portion of the funding allocated for it went on overhead and administrative expenses at offices dispersed across the whole nation. The National Directorate of Employment (NDE), which exclusively offered vocational training to young school dropouts, also had no vacancies of its own to engage unemployed children. To give the young people who complete their training start-up capital, not enough money has been available.

It is against this backdrop that the President Buhari administration introduced N-Power programme in a bid to empower and alleviate the rate of poverty amongst the Nigerian youth ages 18-35 years.

### **Conceptual Review**

**Concept of Youth Empowerment** = Youth empowerment is an attitudinal, structural, and cultural process whereby young people gain the ability, authority, and agency to make decisions and implement change in their own lives (Obadan, 2017). The concept of

youth has been defined by many authors and international organizations. However, there is no universally accepted definition of the youth. The notion youth, varies as much as there are scholars, writers, cultures and societies.

In Nigeria, empowerment is usually equated with making an individual to be economically engaged by having a source of livelihood. That is empowerment is seen as individual development. So, according to the Nigerian government, youth empowerment is the process through which young people get the education, training, and development necessary to have a means of subsistence. For instance, according to the United Nations (2005), youth includes all those between the ages of 15 and 24. All young people between the ages of 12 and 24 are included in the World Bank's expanded definition of youth in 2007. In their own words, Torimiro et al. (1999) defined youth as a group of young individuals between the ages of 13 and 30. Additionally, all young males and females who are citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria who are between the ages of 18 and 35 are referred to as youth in the Nigeria Second National Youth Policy (2009).

The definitions of youth given above are mostly based on the age range. Youth, however, may refer to more than just a certain age group. Not only do young people make up the age group, but their potential energies and innovativeness are the universally desired inborn qualities of young people. These distinguishing characteristics might not exist in either childhood or adulthood. According to Perez-Morales (1996) the issue is that whenever we talk and think about youth, it suggests a group of young people in a society that have a lot of energy, fresh ideas, and new ways to approach life and tackle difficulties. One thing is certain: it is unclear where the line between childhood and adolescence and between adolescence and adulthood is drawn. Therefore, it can be quite challenging to define youth worldwide in terms of a certain age range. The United Nations and others frequently utilize a range of ages just for statistical purposes. Aside from the statistical definition, the term "youth" has continued to take on new meanings as a result of shifting political, economic, and socio-cultural conditions. Since the Federal Government appears to have utilized the definition as a guide to determine program recipients, the National Youth Policy's (2009) definition of youth is adopted for the purposes of the study.

However, there aren't any definitions of empowerment that are generally acknowledged in the literature. Empowerment is viewed as a goal in some of these definitions and as a means in others (Per-Anders, 2008; Gibson, 1991). Per-Anders (2008) defined empowerment as an increase in a person's control over the factors that determine their quality of life, through (necessarily) an increase in their health (for example, through self-confidence, self-esteem, self-efficacy, or autonomy), knowledge (for example, self-knowledge, consciousness raising, skills development, or competence), or freedom (negative or positive).

Empowerment, according to Kabeer (2003), is the capacity for decision-making. Disempowerment is the denial of choice, whereas empowerment is the means by which persons who have been denied the capacity to exercise free will come to possess it. However, Kabeer (2003) pointed out that in order for choice to occur, certain criteria must be met. a. Alternatives must be available. This comprises the capacity for decision-making. As a result, poverty and disempowerment frequently go hand in hand since they make it harder for people to achieve their fundamental requirements, which lead to dependence on others and eliminate the ability to make meaningful decisions. b. Alternatives must not only exist, they must also be seen to exist. When power relationships are not thought of as such, they are most successful. These behaviors may appear to indicate "choice," but they are actually founded on the denial of choice. According to Kabeer (2003), the three closely related dimensions of agency, resources, and achievements can be used to examine the concept of empowerment. The procedures used to make and carry out decisions are referred to as agency. As a result, it is essential to the idea of empowerment. Resources are the means by which agency is used, while accomplishments are the results of agency. These dimensions are all connected, PerAnders (2008).

**Unemployment** = Nigeria sees unemployment is defined as the percentage of the labor force that was available for work but did not work for at least 40 hours in the week before the survey period (NBS, 2017). That is, individuals who are able and willing to work yet are unable to secure better job.

**N-Power** = N-Power is a youth empowerment scheme under the Buhari administration, the Federal Government of Nigeria funded the N-Power youth empowerment programme. N-Power addresses the issue of young unemployment by offering a framework for the development and acquisition of extensive and pertinent work skills while connecting its core and consequences to improving deficient public services and boosting the overall economy. N-Power aims to offer a platform where the majority of Nigerians may access skill development and acquisition. Ages 18 to 35 are the target audience for N-Power in Nigeria. Each participant will be given the opportunity to study and practice the majority of the skills required to obtain or create job thanks to the modular programs offered by N-Power. N-Power aims to provide young Nigerians between the ages of 18 and 35 with the "necessary skills" and "work experience chances," according to its website. It was launched in 2016.

The most recent numbers on the social office's website are from a June 2019 update. Approximately 500,000 graduates were employed as of August 2018 in fields like education, healthcare, agriculture, and tax. Although the graduates are volunteers, the government provides them with a monthly salary of N30,000 (about US\$98).

According to the update, 26,000 non-graduates are interning or undergoing training. The same figures were provided by Mary Uwais, a senior official with the N-Power initiative, in an August 2019 interview with a major publication.

**Poverty** = This means lack and deprivation. It is a condition of little or low income and consumption. According to Ojukwu (2013:338) Poverty is one of the main symptoms or manifestations of under development. In the words of Obi, Nwachukwu and Obiora (2008:169), scholars have come to categorize the definition of poverty into two: absolute and relative poverty. Absolute poverty refers to a situation where an individual lacks the resources necessary to sustain himself or herself. Such an individual lacks the basic human needs of food, shelter, and clothing. This definition of poverty in terms of subsistence is predominantly used by scholars in the analysis of poverty in Africa and in the developing countries in general. On the other hand, relative poverty refers to a situation where an individual lacks the necessary resources when compared with other members of the society such that this limits or prevents him from partaking in the normal and desirable activities of life that exists in such a society. Ojukwu (2013) further posits that poverty is a chronic and debilitating condition that results from multiple adverse synergistic risk factors and affects the mind, body, and soul; it is the state of being without, often associated with need, hardship and lack of resources across a wide range of circumstances. However, it is much more than just not having enough money. In all these two perspectives, poverty portrays a situation of precarious living that subjects one to human, material and physical deprivations. Mbah, Ojukwu and Okoye (2019) contends that out of the 4.6 billion people living in developing countries 1.2 billion live on less than US\$1 a day and 2.8 billion on less than \$2. Poverty in the developing countries continues to be a real and significant feature of these societies. This aspect of developing countries life increased between 1975 and 1990. Poverty in the developing countries today continues to undermine every development efforts in these societies, as problem to be confronted arising from poverty including the “Silent genocide of high infant mortality, youth unemployment, insecurity, poor nutrition and low standard of living” among others subsists.

**Poverty Alleviation** = Ejiofor (2018:5) defines poverty alleviation as a set of measures both economic and humanitarian that is intended to permanently lift people out of poverty.

Alleviation generally means to make pain or difficulty less severe, from the socialist point of view, poverty can only be alleviated through complete overthrow of the capitalist system. But for the capitalist system and the mixed economy ideology frameworks poverty cannot be completely wiped out but can be alleviated through a number of measures. Okeke (2001:15) contends that individuals, groups or governmental organizations adopt from time to time a number of measures in an attempt to avoid falling into the poverty trap set by challenging socio-economic conditions. According to him, this can be through institutional framework of poverty reduction like social security benefits through non-formal financial institutions among others.

Alao (2017-157), noted that the United Nations target of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger is to half between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 a day. He equally listed other inter governmental interventions towards poverty alleviation to include: the new partnership for African Economic Development (NEPAD), The Millennium Development Goals (MGDs) among others. The United Nations Millennium development goals of solving unemployment as a way of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger in the World are to “achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people”. According to Alao (op.cit. 158), poverty, unemployment and inequality have been identified as the major challenges to developing economies.

There are different approaches in dealing with poverty alleviation generally. (Ejiofor, 2018:20-22), identifies about four approaches --- Economic growth approach, basic needs approach, rural development approach and target approach. She states that the economic growth is usually encouraged as a result of low labour absorptive capacity. That this approach focuses on capital formation as it relates to capital stock and human capital. That to ensure growth that takes care of poverty, the share of human capital as a source of growth in output has to be accorded the rightful place. While the basic needs approach calls for the provision of basic needs such as food, shelter, water, sanitation, healthcare, basic education and transportation among others.

In the rural development approach, she states that this approach sees the rural sector as a unique sector in terms of poverty reduction. This is because majority of the poor in developing countries are living in the rural areas. Also, she argues that the level of paid employment in this area is very low. She notes that emphasis in this approach to poverty alleviation has focused on the integrated rural development modeling. Equally, she opines that the approach recognizes a multi-dimensional approach.

Finally, the target approach favours the directing of poverty alleviation programmes at specific groups within the country e.g. the youth, women etc.

### Views by Scholars

Scholars generally agree that youth unemployment is becoming a pervasive problem across the world. According to Longe (2017) even the most developed nations have not shown exception to this frightful social problem. In Africa however, the average unemployment rate is generally high as corroborated by Alawade (2010) when he posited that, unemployment in South Africa, Botswana and Angola was 21%, 17.5% and 25% respectively. According to the NBS (2010), Nigeria has one of the highest national unemployment rates in sub-Saharan Africa between 2000 and 2009. In its report, it asserted that unemployed persons constituted 13.6% in 2001, 12.6% in 2002, 13.4% in 2003, 13.7% 2006, 14.9% in 2008 of the population and 19.7% 2009 respectively.

The figures above shows that 2000 - 2010 witnessed a vertical climb of unemployment rate in the country. Latest findings from the NBS (2016) depicts that a total figure of 52 million peoples within the economically active population of Nigerians are jobless. There exist a plethora of factors that explains the astronomical increase of unemployment in Nigeria. The Chartered Institute of Personnel Management of Nigeria (CIPMN, 2016) relate the unemployment scenario in Nigeria to lack of national employment

policy, sub-optimal quality of graduates, educational system not tailored and aligned to industrial needs and inappropriate educational curricula inter alia. In a related vein, Salami (2013) enumerated five major factors viz; structural, cultural, lack of political will, skewed budgetary allocation and poorly coordinated intervention programmes. He further contends that the structural factors consist of the inadequacies in the current educational policies while the cultural factor has to do with get rich quick syndrome which discourages hard work and meritocracy.

Worthy of amplification is the poorly coordinated interventionist schemes aimed at mitigating the unemployment problems which accords with Salami (2013) postulation that, “most intervention programmes have been poorly coordinated and in some cases either overlap or contradicts one another.” indeed, it has been observed that most of these unemployment mitigation measures have been implemented on an interim bases or have been abused by its handlers by making good with its proceeds and where implemented are marred by inefficiency. Unemployment is an albatross in any society as well a social problem with unprecedented and uncomplimentary consequences. Oluwajodu, Baauwe, Greyting and Kleyhans (2015) states that unemployment reduces economic welfares output and erode human capital. The implication is that the economic benefit that should have accrued from the maximization of the human capital is usually lost. Also, unemployment leads to social vices like armed robbery, kidnapping, fraud etc. This is not to undermine gene wing and concerted efforts aimed at containing the ravaging monster unemployment that have colored the pages of history books in Nigeria as enunciated by many scholarly works and researches.

In their own contributions (Aku, et al 1997: 41-52) opine that the level of poverty in Nigeria today is difficult to imagine. They argue that poverty in Nigeria is explained by the combined factors of inadequate food supply and limited entitlement to food. That since independence, Nigerian policy makers have always conceived poverty as a byproduct of stagnation and decline in economic growth and have therefore continued to emphasize growth as a mechanism through which the problem of poverty can be alleviated.

However, they made the following recommendations to the Nigerian government on the formulation of future economic, empowerment and development strategies. First, they suggested that with respect to industrialization, that Nigeria can borrow a lead from Japan, South Korea and Malaysia. Japan according to them restricted importation, introduced import substitution, introduced selective nationalization, strict control over access to foreign exchange and positive discrimination against firms and industries capable of employing advanced technologies. South Korea on the other hand they pointed out promoted labour intensive import-substitution which later led to exports. Going along this line, they argue, would not only eliminate restrictions on income generation among the poor and narrow the disparity, but would also create employment opportunities necessary for the improvement of their welfare.

They finally submitted that borrowing the South East Asia example will help deal with the various dimensions of poverty in Nigeria. Some of the schemes they recommended for borrowing are: the Food for Work, (FFW) scheme (a programme of food aid concentrated in the rural areas and targeted at needy groups) and Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS). These programmes according to them are more directly concerned with attacking the problem of food shortage and unemployment. They noted that variants of FFW have been implemented in countries like Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt and Sri Lanka with successful results.

The contributions of the foregoing works we have reviewed are okay but the gap between them and our own topic is that they were based on economism in orientation thereby ignoring the problem associated with the malfunctioning of Nigerian political institutions and the incidence of corruption and other social forces standing as obstacles to successful implementation of poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria, which we have set out to find out and suggest possible ways of addressing them holistically. However, some of their recommendations are useful and will be integrated into this study.

Furthermore, there have been attempts at poverty alleviation and youth empowerment in Nigeria. According to Mbah and Obiora, (2015:134), prominent among them are; 1972 National Accelerated Food Production Programme and the Nigerian Agricultural and Co-operative Bank, 1976 Operation Feed the Nation, the 1979 Green Revolution Programme, 1986 Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), 1993 Family Support Programme and the Family Economic Advancement Programme and 2001 National Poverty Eradication Programme. They maintained that, this was primarily to replace the previously failed poverty alleviation programme. Operation Feed the Nation was launched by the former president Olusegun Obasanjo led regime. The focus of the programme was to increase food production on the premise that availability of cheap food will mean higher nutrition level and invariably lead to national growth and development.

When President Shehu Shagari came to power in 1979, he abandoned Operation Feed the Nation and came up with another poverty alleviation programme named Green Revolution, which also focused on food production. Mbah and Obiora, (2015:135), maintained that it is lack of continuity and shift in approach that trailed poverty alleviation programmess since the ouster of Shagari from power in 1983. Every succeeding military regime had a different idea—or none at all. Because there was scarcely any continuity with those

started by previous regimes, poverty reduction programmes became more "regime specific". This policy discontinuation has been a problem in Nigeria's quest to guarantee a lasting poverty reduction programme in the country.

The Federal Government of Nigeria launched a strategy plan for job creation and youth empowerment in 2016 in response to the pervasive state of unemployment and its perceived link to poverty and disempowerment (DFID, 2017; N-Power Information guide, 2017). In general, the program's framework identified four important growth sectors with the potential to generate significant employment possibilities. Construction, information and communications technology (ICT), agriculture and agro-allied businesses, wholesale trade, and retail trade were among these two industries. Three main strands, N-power, Skills Acquisition, and Innovation Hubs, look to constitute the foundation for the framework's deployment starting in the first quarter of 2016 (DFID, 2017).

According to Okoro and Bassey, (2018:12), a national social investment programme called N-power was established by the federal government with the express purpose of empowering young people and creating jobs. Increasing the human capital of the Nigerian labour force was essentially one of the program's goals (N-Power Information Guide, 2017). The area of increased human capital seems to be young employment, which was supposed to be handled through youth empowerment. The development of young people's skills in vital fields including agriculture, health care, and education was to assure youth empowerment.

The programme's main goal appears to revolve around the development of the talents of Nigerian young, both educated and uneducated, who had little possibility of finding employment, even at the minimum level required to survive or establish a family (Okoro and Bassey, 2018; N-Power Information Guide 2017). The initiative was also created to help close the teacher shortage in elementary schools and to help provide basic education to kids in rural areas, especially those in underprivileged groups. Additionally, the initiative was developed to staff primary health care facilities in regions that look to be understaffed as well as to staff agricultural businesses.

However, poverty is a significant problem that confronts any serious nation, and it is mostly caused by the ineffective use of the teeming pool of young labour. This axiom inspired the Federal Government of Nigeria to create and implement the "N-Power" social investment program, which had the following objectives: to intervene and significantly improve the lives of a significant number of young unemployed Nigerians. to establish an ecosystem of solutions for failing public services and government diversification policies; to develop a quality system of the transfer of employability, entrepreneurial, and technical skills; and to advance and strengthen Nigeria's knowledge-based economy (N-Power Information guide, 2017).

The poverty rate in Nigeria is alarming and worrisome. This is due to Nigeria's potential in terms of its natural resources, human resources, and numerical strength, poverty is endemic and engulfs a large proportion of her population. Orokpo, Haruna and Mutong (2018) stated that "the issue of poverty in Nigeria is a paradox, a case of poverty in the midst of plenty". Similarly, Gonba (2006) remarked that the human poverty index 1999, placed Nigeria among the 25 poorest in the world. according to UNDP (2010) report, the population in poverty is pegged at 68.7 million as at 2004 and in the last quota of 2016, the NBS reported that about 112 million Nigerian representing 67.1% of the country total population of 160 million then are living below poverty level (Vanguard Newspaper, 2016). Generally, the available statistics' on the incidence of poverty in Nigeria revealed certain characteristics. These Include' that the majority of the poor in Nigeria reside in the rural areas; that poverty is higher in the Northern part of the country than the South and lastly, that though there exist disparity in the poverty rates between North and South/ rural and urban areas, the urban slums dwellers are the most deprived group in the country.

Summarily, Nigeria's problems can be linked to a number of factors, such as its turbulent political history, government waste and corruption, the absence of cogent laws, implementation evaluation, over dependent on oil, poor infrastructures amongst others. Over the years, government has reacted strongly to the rising poverty trend in the country. Ogwumike (2015) stated that, several poverty reduction approaches have been formulated and implemented all with the objective or attempts geared towards arresting the beleaguered poverty situation in the country. From 1999 till date, some of the poverty reduction measures includes the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), SURE- P, NSIPS etc. despite the litanies of programmes on poverty reduction in Nigeria, it has been observed that the incidence of poverty in Nigeria is exacerbating rather than ameliorating.

The Federal Government's aggressive investment in youth development also addresses some of the long-standing shortcomings in public services, such as the low teacher-to-student ratio in public primary schools, the high prevalence of diseases that can be prevented, the lack of science and knowledge to support production, and the dearth of taxable individuals within the tax net. With the launch of N-Power, the Federal Government offers a framework for the development and acquisition of extensive and pertinent work skills, as well as the use of a sizable volunteer workforce to address various issues with public services and boost the overall economy.

In 2016, the Federal Government employed and deployed 200,000 young Nigerians through N-Power in public primary schools and primary healthcare facilities across all of Nigeria's Local Government Areas (N-Power Information Guide, 2017). This was Africa's largest post-tertiary human resource engagement. The N-Power volunteer corps added 300,000 new members in 2017, bringing the total to roughly 500,000.

Like any other programme, this one has had its share of difficulties. This report aims to identify the issues preventing the programme from operating well and offers answers by making sound suggestions for the government's future. The researcher attempts to focus on a smaller scale because the government considers difficulties on a broad scale, in order to truly highlight problems that might not be visible when the programme is examined holistically.

### **Important N-Power Areas**

According to the N-Power Information Guide (2017), Volunteers are required to offer teaching, instructional, and advising solutions in four (4) important areas.

**N-Power Teach:** This group of recipients is anticipated to contribute to an improvement in the provision of basic education in Nigeria. In Nigeria's primary schools, when there appears to be a staffing shortage, N-Power Teach Volunteers are placed as teaching assistants. They will serve as support teachers around the nation, helping with teaching, school administration, and other duties in the classrooms, rather than taking the position of the current instructors. They must, if at all possible, assist in providing children in underserved neighborhoods with basic education (N-Power Information Guide, 2017). The N-Power Teach curriculum also includes N-Power Teach (STEM). Through this programme, young graduates with expertise in computer programming and other related professions are needed to help the federal government implement the STEM Programme for the country's primary and secondary schools (N-Power Information guide, 2017).

**N-Power Health:** As part of this program's strand, N-Power Health recipients are expected to help improve and promote preventive healthcare for families, individuals, pregnant women, children, and other vulnerable members of society in their local areas. Only people who study certificate- and diploma-level courses in health and medicine are permitted in this region (N-Power Information Guide, 2017).

**N-Power Agro:** N-Power Agro recipients are expected to offer advice to farmers all around the nation. They are anticipated to share the expertise that the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development has accumulated in the field of extension services. They must also collect information on Nigeria's agricultural resources. Youth who have taken courses connected to agriculture are welcome in this region (N-Power Information Guide, 2017).

**The Voluntary Asset and Income Declaration Scheme (VAIDS):** VAIDS aims to persuade non-compliant and partially compliant taxpayers to voluntarily disclose their true income and assets and pay the proper amount of tax that is owed to the government. As community tax liaison officers, the N-Power VAIDS volunteers are expected to perform the following main duties, including tax promotion, document review, record keeping, responding to internet questions, customer management, and report writing, among others. This important sector attracted young people with post-secondary degrees in subjects linked to computer and information science (N-Power Information guide, 2017).

Finally, the immediate goal of the state youth policy is the all round development of the potential achievement of long term goals, social, economic cultural development of the country, ensuring the international competitiveness and strengthening national security. These state youth policy goals are not being achieved, it is rather negatively carried out in such areas as;

- i. Legal conditions for the implementation of youth policy.
- ii. Youth policy regulation.
- iii. Information, material and financial support for youth policy.

Another aspect of challenge encountered by youth empowerment in Nigeria is low level education and employment. The level of education directly affects the likelihood of employment for youth. Due to the quantity of education and as a result of the fact that such issues as strikes and other interruptions, youths are not able to enter the workforce early enough. This is why you find most Nigerian youths under the age of 29 with only a secondary school diploma and still struggling to graduate from a university. If they intend to take professional courses, this affects them even more. Ikande (2017) buttress that political violence is one of the major challenges of youth empowerment programme in Nigeria. She stated "when peaceful means do not work, the radicalization among youths will continue to grow". This then results in a lack of flexibility of the political system when it comes to meeting the requirements of the people. Peaceful youth protest will end up resorting to violence. The purpose of such actions is to undermine the authority of political forces and even to delegitimize the political system.

The methods of violence are diverse terrorism, unrest, strikes with calls for violence, sabotage, kidnapping, hostage taking murder etc. Corruption is another challenge of youth empowerment programme in Nigeria. Corruption of power through bribery is rampant because there are always officials who demand to be paid for certain services. The number of such officials continues to grow.



Accurate data on the extent of corruption in various areas of government cannot be pinpointed, but it is clear that this phenomenon is only getting worse as the day rolls by.

Another challenge is government incompetence and limited participating policies. It is often believed that participation in the formal political process may not necessarily provide the youth with an ideal outlet for the expression of their cogent needs, aspirations or even their most profound grievances. Several scenarios have indicated that young people are more commonly raised on countries that are characterized by the existence of conservative power structures, patronage networks and intergenerational hierarchies which exclude them from decision making and do not meet their needs where youth feel existing power structures marginalize them and in some cases obliterate them. However, the interest of young people is vastly different from those of older people. Young people want to change the world and establish their own innovative values. The youths in Nigeria can only change their society for better if they have effective support of their government. That's why youth empowerment in Nigeria is so important.

The issue of unemployment and recruitment are being tackled by these recent government poverty alleviation programmes like, the immediate past YouWIN programme and the current N-Power programme. Their major concern is job creation by encouraging and supporting aspiring entrepreneurship youth in Nigeria to develop and execute business ideas.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study adopted the theory of incrementalism as its analytical framework. Despite that many scholars contributed towards developing the incremental theory, the theory was populated by Charles E. Lindblom (1959) in his book "Strategy of Decision". According to him, policies are; "made and remade and endlessly, a succession of incremental changes, building out from the current situations step by step and in a small degrees". We found the theory appropriate in the study of "poverty alleviation programme and youth empowerment" because it states that "a policy is directed at a problem, it is tried, altered and tried in its altered form; altered again and so forth, in the process of solving a particular problem, incremental policies build upon one another. This theory is also known as "disjointed incrementalism" (Lindblom, 1959). According to Henry (2004:307) in Obi, Nwachukwu and Obiora (2008:47), disjointed in this context, means that the analysis and evaluation of conditions and alternative responses to perceived conditions are uncoordinated and occur throughout society, and incrementalism means that only a limited selection of policy alternatives are provided to policy makers and that each one of these alternatives represents only an infinitesimal change in the status quo.

Again, they maintained that incremental model operates from the premise that the decision maker is not really interested in completely new solutions that are radically different from previous decisions instead his interest lies in improvements on previous decision. All decisions are therefore modifications of existing ones. Also, the model has been scored very high on some points. First, it emphasizes caution in discarding government policies by new regimes that may be in a hurry to impress the people. It is a, model that emphasizes continuity in government policies. Secondly, the incremental nature of government policies makes it easy for the government to carry the people along since the radical changes in policies often leaves the people far behind the government. This creates problems for the government, in that it may result in policy resistance, sabotage or indifference. Thirdly, the incremental nature of government policies under this model, leads to responsiveness. This arises from the fact that the piecemeal nature of the model allows for adjustment during policy implementation. Whenever there is a serious complaint against a public policy, it is always easy to adjust it because incremental decisions are not fundamental decisions that are rigid. Its in-built flexibility makes it more responsive than rational comprehensive decisions.

### **Impact of N-Power's on the Socio-economic Advancement of Youth in Nigeria**

The impact of Nigeria's N-Power initiative on youth empowerment has not been thoroughly studied. The N-Power Programme's effects on recipients' socioeconomic lives in Nasarawa state's Akwanga Metropolis were the subject of a study by Abin (2018:4). The study demonstrated that the programme significantly improved the socioeconomic circumstances of the beneficiaries by enhancing their material, social, and financial well-being. The analysis also showed that the recipients of the programme were overwhelmingly satisfied. Since having control over one's life and the ability to make decisions are essential components of empowerment, it may be concluded that the programme had an effect on young empowerment. This is due to the fact that having financial security in Nigeria appears to provide people a great deal of discretionary income and control over their life.

### **Challenges Facing Nigeria's N-Power Programme in Promoting Youth Empowerment**

Few studies have identified the difficulties the N-Power programme faces in ensuring youth empowerment in Nigeria. According to a research by Abin (2018: 7), the programme struggled with issues like late and underpaid stipend payments to volunteers. The programme's excessive centralization was another issue identified. This has the potential to hinder interactions between programme administrators and beneficiaries and restrict opportunities to improve the programme by better comprehending beneficiaries' needs. In their study, Okoro and Bassey (2018:12), they found that the programme did not train volunteers to become teachers prior to their deployment in the N-Teach strand. This suggests that prior to their deployment; the organization had not given these volunteers the authority to pursue a career as teachers.

However, the N-Power programme was well received when it was presented by the government of President Muhammad Buhari in June 2016. By providing them with useful skills for job advancement, the programme aims to involve both graduates and non-graduates and turn Nigeria into a knowledge economy.

The sole component of the initiative that has begun is the N-Power volunteer corps, one of its components that intend to give work to 500,000 unemployed Nigerian graduates. The volunteer programme has benefited some of its participants after one year, but Nigerians may have reason to be concerned.

Since its start, the N-Power volunteer program has been beset by numerous problems. Only a few minutes after accepting applications, the official website crashed. Since returning to duty in December of last year, volunteers have not yet received the "super helpful tab" that will aid them in doing their duties. The delayed distribution of stipends has also caused some volunteers to voice their displeasure. The fact that the plan is currently being blatantly misused, however, is very concerning.

When Mr. Afolabi Imoukhuede, Senior Special Assistant to the President on Job Creation and Youth Employment, visited Imo State recently, he was worried by the large number of N-power volunteers who were not present at their places of employment. Investigations show that numerous N-power volunteer corps members around the nation collect stipends without performing any labour, therefore this issue is not limited to Imo state volunteers. It appears that some of the program's volunteers hold down other occupations that they must balance while receiving payment from the government.

### **Youth Empowerment Schemes and Poverty Alleviation**

The reduction of poverty is generally seen as the main goal of development. The cycle of poverty keeps the underprivileged in an impoverished state. The idea of poverty, which reflects its many obvious characteristics, is multifaceted. Poverty according to Na'Allah (2004) and Kwaghe (2006) is multi-dimensional, because it affects many aspects of the human condition, including physical, moral and psychological. For many societies, poverty is a concrete phenomenon and can easily be identified. Furthermore, it is relative because those who are considered poor in industrialized economies may be seen as materially wealthy in least developed ones. Each society as pointed out by Kwaghe (2006) defined poverty in its own terms. Conventional measures of poverty count the number of people below the poverty line and define the poverty rate as the proportion of total population below the poverty line. He contends that poverty is consequently a normative issue and that determining the poverty line necessitates an assessment of societal norms. Whatever the definition of poverty, it has been said that those who lack the means to maintain a healthy lifestyle, secure employment, own property, or receive an acceptable income are considered to be poor (Obadan, 2017). They also lack adequate level of education and cannot satisfy their basic needs (Sancho, 1996).

Thus, the poor are often illiterate, poor in health and have short life spans (Farmanesh et al, 2005). They have no access to basic necessities of life. They are unable to meet both social and economic obligations, lack skills and gainful empowerment, fewer, economic assets and sometimes lack self-esteem. The poor according to Farmanesh et al (2005) are those with income below the poverty line, who lack access to basic services, practical contacts and other forms of support. They are people isolated in rural areas and the marginal urban zones where essential infrastructure is lacking. The preceding definitions indicated that perceptions about poverty have not only evolved historically but also vary tremendously from culture to culture. The criteria for distinguishing the poor from the non-poor tend to reflect national or societal normative concepts and priorities. And as countries or societies become wealthier, their perceptions of acceptable deprivation change (Kwaghe, 2006).

Although, the task of alleviating and eradicating poverty is difficult, it is impossible. In the past years, governments of developing countries and the World Bank have focused almost exclusively on agricultural developments as the way to reducing rural poverty and achieve sustainable economic growth. The introduction of N-Power Programme under the umbrella social empowerment safety net represents a strategy of alleviating poverty amongst 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). The study also postulates a hypothesis for testing which states that there is no significant relationship between the socio-economic characteristics (age and educational level) of the respondents and their involvement in the empowerment scheme.

### **Findings**

1. Having taken a detailed examination of poverty alleviation and youth empowerment programme in Nigeria, 2015-2019 (N-Power) which was a policy of the Buhari administration that professed its intention to radically solve the unemployment quagmire in the country, it was discovered that the programme was introduced as a result of the failure of previous youth employment schemes to vigorously combat the scourge of youths unemployment in order to alleviate poverty amongst them.
2. The study also found out that the major problem of past poverty alleviation and youth empowerment programme in Nigeria is discontinuation, which is policy inconsistency as no administration continues with the policy/programmes of the past administration.

3. This study equally found out that it is in reaction to the endemic situation of unemployment and its relationship with poverty and youth disempowerment, that the federal government of Nigeria initiated strategic plan for job creation in 2016 which is N-Power.
4. During the course of this study, it was found out that the core objective of Buhari's N-Power programme hinge on skill acquisition and development of Nigerian youth, both educated and non educated, who had minimal hope of securing jobs even at the minimum level needed to survive or raise a family.
5. The N-Power initiative, which was developed to help children in rural locations, especially those in marginalized groups, receive a basic education, was also discovered by this investigation. It was created to fill the employment gaps in the teaching profession in primary schools. It was also established to supply labor to rural areas' understaffed basic healthcare facilities as well as labour for the agriculture business.

### Conclusion

This study examined poverty alleviation programmes and youth empowerment programme in Nigeria with particular focus on N-Power, youth empowerment programme of the Buhari administration. The study saw through its scholars' review and discussions of various scholars on the subject the embarrassing paradox of poverty in the midst of plenty in Nigeria, which suggests the compelling need for a vigorous policy pursuit to objectively tackle the alarming rate of youth unemployment leading to poverty in Nigeria. As a result therefore, the Jonathan administration introduced YOUWIN as a panacea to this monster ravaging the country. The programme nevertheless made its own contributions towards youth's empowerment, but its contributions were not enough and the monster poverty is still rearing its ugly head in the country. To compound the problem further, the programme was confronted by a lot of infrastructural deficits and its laudable objectives were not realized. The Buhari administration that took over from the Jonathan administration discontinued that well thought programme that benefited some youths in the six geo political zones of the country.

But in line with the country's culture of policy discontinuation, Buhari administration went ahead to introduce the regime's N-Power, whose fate is yet to be determined as many youths in Nigeria with tertiary institution certificates have remained unemployed and therefore poor, the little hope we have in the N-Power programme is that if the mistakes of the past poverty alleviation and youth empowerment programmes in the country will be corrected, the programme will be an improvement on the past ones and lead Nigerian youths to the promised land.

### Recommendations

Due to the findings of this study and conclusion reached, we made the following recommendations:

1. A vigorous policy to tackle the alarming rate of youth unemployment is urgently needed as previous ones have failed to stem the tide towards this direction. N-Power in fairness to truth is a good programme that was beset with a lot of problems like poor and ineffective implementation of the programme, that if they were corrected could have addressed the problem of youth unemployment, through entrepreneurship and reduce poverty amongst them. N-Power, is a new policy to combat youth unemployment reduce poverty and empower the youth.
2. Since government is a continuum, there is the need that the leadership of the country should try and make it a tradition for every administration, with little or no amendment to continue with the good policies and programmes of successive administration in Nigeria.
3. There is the need for federal government to consolidate the N-Power scheme, since the creation of the programme was borne out of the need to empower the Nigerian youths and save them the danger of unemployment. Terminating the life of the programme will throw them back in the unemployment crisis in the country.
4. The management of the N-Power programme should train the N-Power beneficiaries on some basic entrepreneurship skills in order to help them sustain their monthly stipends and succeed as would be entrepreneurs.
5. There is also the need to mount high level surveillance on the N-Power beneficiaries as many are receiving the stipend without doing the job. Those in N-Teach, N-Health as well as N-Agro, should be made by the management of the scheme, to be committed in their respective Place of Primary Assignment (PPA), as it will guarantee the development of the communities they are serving and the Nigerian state at large.

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