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Poverty Alleviation Programmes And Socioeconomic Development In Nigeria: A Study of the N-Power Programme In The Niger Delta

O. G. E. Ugben[1] & A. Egobueze[2*]

[1,2]Department of Political Science,
Faculty of Social Sciences,
Rivers State University, Nkpolu - Oroworukwo, Port Harcourt, Nigeria
***anthony.egobueze@ust.edu.ng**

ABSTRACT
This paper examined the impact of poverty alleviation programmes, with a specific focus on the N-Power programme, on socioeconomic development in Nigeria, particularly in the Niger Delta. Utilizing the System theory and a systems approach as its theoretical framework, the research employed a survey design that gathered both primary data (through questionnaires and interviews) and secondary data. Data analysis involved simple percentage methods. The findings indicated that the N-Power programme has positively influenced the socioeconomic development of beneficiaries by providing them with resources such as computers/tablets and monthly stipends, which enhanced their skills and technical proficiency. However, several constraints hinder the programme's effectiveness, including inadequate provision of computers/tablets to volunteers, delays in stipend payments, poor data management, bribery, lack of transparency, political interference, insufficient funding, and inappropriate targeting of the impoverished. To improve the situation, the paper recommends that state and local governments collect accurate data on poverty in their areas while the federal government should initiate and oversee anti-poverty schemes in the Niger Delta.
Keywords: Development, N-Power Programme, Poverty Alleviation, Niger Delta, Skill Acquisition, Socioeconomic Development.

1. INTRODUCTION

Poverty, no doubt, is a global phenomenon. It remains one of the greatest enemies of mankind and a source of worry and challenge to both government of developed and developing nations (Idakwoji, 2015). However, for many reasons that are now obvious, developing countries like Nigeria experience the incidence of poverty far more than the developed countries (Banigo, Ugben and Amadi, 2024). According to Okonkwo (2018), the issue of poverty, poverty alleviation and socio-economic development have become very popular in academic literatures and the preoccupation of the federal, state and local governments and their institutions in the face of current globalization. Poverty has been described as a universal threat to the socio-economic wellbeing of many individuals, families, states and countries. It is said to be pervasive since it is not restricted to any particular sector of the economy as it constitutes a major development problem to the extent that it has economy-wide causes and consequences which cannot be eradicated through hurriedly prepared ad hoc programmes (Oghiagbephan, 2016).

In the face of poverty, Nigeria has been described as a paradox where the poverty level contradicts the image and the country's economic wealth (Okwuadimma, 2023). The author opines that there appears a clear demarcation between the country's enormous human, agricultural, petroleum, gas, and large untapped solid mineral resources and the poverty level inherent among her people. Historically, Idakwoji (2015) opines that Nigeria as at 1999 was ranked as one of the 175th poorest nations. It was noted from the UNDP that 72% of Nigerians live below the poverty line. The UNDP report further indicated that out of 173 countries studied, Nigeria is the 26th least developed country on the globe. Currently, over 60% of Nigerians earn less than one dollar per (1$) day (NBS, 2022). Various surveys in the socioeconomic spheres showed that Nigerians are not only suffering from malnutrition but also inflicted by preventable diseases.

Regrettably however, Nigeria is classified among countries which suffer in the midst of abundant human and material resources (Jacob, Ugben and Akujuru, 2024). The scholar opined that the 1997 Poverty Assessment Study conducted by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) compared Nigeria with five selected countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America (Ghana, South Africa, Indonesia, Brazil and Mexico) on a number of indicators and thus revealed that Nigeria was the poorest among these poor nations. The basic indicators used include GDP per capita, percentage of population living below the international poverty line, infant mortality rates, prevalence of malnutrition, access to portable water and sanitation, basic education indicators such as enrolment ratios at various levels, adult literacy and availability of basic infrastructure such as electricity consumption, communication services, roads, etc. According to Idakwoji, the 2003 World Bank Report on poverty assessment also placed Nigeria as the 13th poorest country in the globe. Even though, Nigerians particularly the highly placed officials of government rejected the report and viewed it as attempt to blackmail Nigeria in the eyes of the international community, the fact remains that majority of Nigerians are very much aware that Nigerians are living below the poverty line. A close contact with the people at the grassroot communities show that the majority of Nigerians are living in squalors, and are increasingly finding it difficult to meet up with the demands of their basic needs.

In most recent development, particularly worrisome is that the country earned over US$300 billion from petroleum resources during the period under review, 2016 – 2023 while between April and June 2023, Nigeria earned some 5.6 trillion Nigerian naira (NGN) of crude oil, roughly seven billion U.S. dollars (NBS, 2022). But rather than record remarkable progress in national socio-economic development, Nigeria is currently the richest country in the list of Africa countries of South Africa, Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, Angola, Kenya, Tanzania, and Ethiopia but retrogressed to become one of the countries with high poverty rate in the midst of abundant resources (Africa News, 2023). Between 2016 and 2022, there exist a deterioration in welfare and increase in poverty in the country. Available records indicate that sixty-three percent of people that is 133 million are multidimensionally poor. The report further revealed that multidimensional poverty is higher in rural areas, where 58% of the people are poor, compared to 42% of people in urban areas (NBS, 2022). This indicates that there is a shift in economic progress from the rural areas to urban areas to boost socioeconomic significance in trade liberalization and economic settlement.

In recognition of the devastating effects of poverty on the people, environment and socio-economic development, poverty alleviation programmes have been on the agenda of the United Nations with several publications by the United Nations Development Programme and the Human Development Index (HDI) which placed most African States at the bottom of the development pyramid (Jacob, Ugben and Akujuru, 2024). It is in furtherance to this phenomenon that former President Obasanjo's administration in Nigeria established the National Poverty Alleviation Programme (NAPEP) in 2001 with the objectives of coordinating and monitoring poverty eradication efforts at all levels. Since its inception, it occasionally embarks on key intervention programmes aimed at integrating the poor particularly at the grassroots into the National Economic Development Process (NEDP). This scheme on poverty eradication has been structured to have four factor schemes which include the Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES) which is

concerned with availing the unemployed youths with opportunities in areas of skills acquisition, employment and wealth generation. The second is the Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme (RIDS). The aim of the scheme is to make sure that there is provision and development of infrastructure needs in the areas of transport, energy, water and communication, especially in the rural areas. The third is the Social Welfare Schemes (SOWESS). This is conceived to provide basic social amenities or services including quality primary and special education, strengthen the economic power of farmers, provide primary health care, among others. The fourth scheme is the National Resources Development and Conservation Scheme (NRDCS). The general aim of this scheme is to bring about both participatory and sustainable development in agricultural, mineral and water resources. Each of these areas have specific programmes to actualize their vision. The goal of the NAPEP is to eradicate poverty from Nigeria by 2010. NAPEP swung into action by providing varied services and programmes with a view to alleviating poverty from the larger segment of the society. It would seem that the level of poverty is so deep that coordinated and consistent programmes have to be executed for them to make appreciated impact on poverty. The programme was later given a new lease by introducing the Keke-NAPEP schemes to reduce the "army" of unemployed Nigerians by providing them with tricycles to improve the socioeconomic lives of the people (Oghiagbephan, 2016).

Going forward to 2016, the administration of former President Muhammadu Buhari initiated several other programmes to reduce poverty and boost socioeconomic development. One of such programmes is the N-Power scheme. The scheme is one of the social intervention programmes designed to create jobs and empowerment for young Nigerians to acquire and develop life-long skills to become solution providers in their communities and to become players in the domestic and global markets. At this time however, the initial modular programmes in N-Power are designed for Nigerian citizens between the ages of 18 and 35. In the quest to actualize the policy frame and safe guard the needful social safety nets, N-Power is aimed at addressing the challenges of unemployment especially among graduate youths as it is categorized the programme into graduate and nongraduate components. The graduate component is made up of N-Teach, N-Agro, N-Health and N-Tax while it targeted 500,000 graduates at the first phase. The nongraduate component is made up of N-Power knowledge with 25,000 nongraduates, N-Build with 75,000 nongraduates and most recently N-Tech which covers both hardware and software devices (Obadan, 2017). Interestingly, poverty alleviation policies seek to improve the living standards of the unemployed and the mass low-income population and this involves the mobilization and allocation of resources so as to reach a balance between welfare and productive services available to the people. Mass participation is a process of participating in government policy for self-sustaining and this involves the development of skills and implementing capacity, and the presence of institutions at the various levels to ensure effective use of the opportunities to foster socioeconomic improvement.

A close look at the Nigerian situation reveals that the incidence of poverty has been very high and embarrassing. Despite all the poverty alleviation programmes listed above, there is a malfunctioning in the production and distribution of the available resources in the country and that is one of the causes of poverty in the country. Affirming the submission above, Obi, Nwachukwu and Obiora declared that this situation has made poverty alleviation to feature very prominently on the developmental programmes of successive Nigerian governments. They however, stressed that government's laudable objectives have failed over the years to address adequately this debilitating problem of poverty, hence its persistence in the country. In this light, Steve Nkom asserted that Nigeria is a poor nation amidst plenty and the paradox of poverty. Similarly, Hoe noted that the average Nigerian can be likened to someone struggling to wash his hands with spittle in the midst of the ocean. He opined that the poverty situation is paradoxical and can be clearly understood when one considers the fact that Nigeria has the club of billionaires and trillionaires who are regarded as some of the richest in the world, the history and background sources of these wealthy people can be traced to the national income resources which were lopsidedly distributed. Thus, we are a people resident at the riverside and yet thirsty without water to drink. In this light, this

study investigates poverty alleviation programme and socioeconomic development with focus on the N-Power programme in the Niger Delta.

Based on the above, a research question is posed thus: How has N-Power Programme impacted poverty reduction among beneficiaries in the Niger Delta?

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Systems theory was adopted by the paper as theoretical framework. Onah (2015) noted that the theory which was the work of Ludwig Von Bertallanfy propounded in 1930 gained popularity in the field of biological sciences. It was later adopted by scholars to analyse social behaviour and phenomena. The scholar further states that the theory was used in the study of "*Social Psychology of Organizations"* by Daniel Katz and Robert Khan in 1966. He further stresses that Nwankwo (1985) also utilized it in "*Education and Training for Public Management in Nigeria".* However, this study adopts the political systems of David Easton.

The political systems theory not the general systems owe its origin to David Easton who is reputed to be the scholar that attempted to analyse politics and public policy from the perspective of systems in his famous work political system which appeared in 1953. His work which was regarded as the foundation of the behaviourist revolution in political science outlined eight major characteristics. He described the characteristics as the intellectual foundation stone of behaviourism which are regularities, verification, techniques, quantification, values, systemisation, pure science, and integration. This theory, according to Iglupas (2015), perceives government programme as a response of a political system to forces brought to bear upon it from the environment. The environment is any condition or circumstance defined as external to the boundaries of the political system. The political system is the group of interrelated structures and processes which function authoritatively to allocate values for a society. The output of the political system is the authoritative value allocations of the system, and these allocations constitute government.

In other words, a political system may be that system of interactions in any society through which authoritative allocations are made and implemented in the form of policies and decisions. Government programmes may also be seen as a political system's response to demands arising from its environment. The political system, as Easton defines it, comprises those identifiable and interrelated institutions and activities (what we usually think of as government institutions and political processes) in a society that make authoritative allocations of values (programmes) that are binding on society (Anderson, 1997). This environment consists of all phenomena-the social system, the economic system, the biological setting-that are external to the boundaries of the political system. Thus, at least analytically one can separate the political system from all the other components of a society (Easton, 1965). If the open system model is applied in government programme analysis, the issues to reflect on include the nature of the components of the system which constitute the sub-systems, and the outside components that impinge on the system directly, which is referred to supra-system (Dlakwa, 2004). Inputs into the political system from the environment consist of demands and supports. Demands are usually the claims for action that individuals and groups make to satisfy their interest and values. Support is rendered when groups and individuals abide by election results, pay taxes, obey laws, and otherwise accept decisions and actions taken by the political system in response to demands. The amount of support for a political system indicates the extent to which it is regarded as legitimate, or as authoritative and binding on its citizens. On the other hand, outputs of the political system include laws, rules, judicial decisions, and the like. Regarded as the authoritative allocations of values, they constitute government programme. The concept of feedback indicates that public policies (outputs) made at a given time may subsequently alter the environment and the demands arising therefrom, as well as the character of the political system itself. Policy outputs may produce new demands, which lead to further outputs, and so on in a never-ending flow of government programme. On the whole, this model applies systems theory to government's poverty alleviation programmes and socioeconomic development process in Nigeria. In simple words, according to this model, the political system receives inputs (poverty alleviation programmes) from its environment and

converts them into outputs (implementation processes and results). These inputs are in the form of demands from groups or individuals for specific policy outcomes. The policy outcomes take the form of determination of societal values and allocation of resources. A feedback loop exists by which the outputs alter the future inputs. In other words, systems theory conceives government programme as the response of the political system to demands from its environment. The political system consists of those institutions such as the political elites and the ministry of humanitarian affairs that make authoritative allocation of values binding on the governed and the society as a whole. The environment of the political system consists of those institutions found in the economic, social, cultural and international systems which shape political process and whose activities are influenced by the political system. Using systems approach, it is assumed that a state of mutual causation exists between government programmes and environmental variables. The usefulness of the systems theory in studying government programme is limited by its highly general and abstract nature. It does not, moreover, say much about the procedures and processes by which decisions are made and policy is developed within the "black box" called the political system. Indeed, systems theory results are sometimes characterised as input-output studies. Nonetheless, this approach can be helpful in organising inquiry into policy formation since it alerts us the political process of how inputs in programme affect the environment, how government programme relates to subsequent demands and how well the political system is able to convert demands (government programme) to results and preserve itself over time.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Survey research design was adopted for this paper with a population sample of Niger Delta put at 44,112,908. This figure is based on the statistical research jointly conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and the National Population Commission (NPC) in 2019. See state-by-state population of the Niger Delta region in the table below:

Table 1: State-by-State Population in the Niger-Delta

S/N	States	2006 Census Population	Projected Population
1	Abia	2,833,999	3,841,943
2	Akwa Ibom	3,920,208	5,451,581
3	Bayelsa	1,703,358	2,934,725
4	Cross River	2,888,966	4,175,020
5	Delta	4,098,391	5,636,100
6	Edo	3,218,332	4,461,137
7	Imo	3,934,899	5,167,722
8	Ondo	3,441,024	4,969,707
9	Rivers	5,185,400	7,474,973
	TOTAL	**31,224,577**	**44,112,908**

Source: National Population Commission, 2006;
National Bureau of Statistics, 2019

The sample size of 400 for this study was determined using Taro Yamane technique for sample size determination. The instruments for the data collection include the questionnaire and interview. Data was analysed using simple percentages.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Socio-demographic Analysis of Response Rate

Administration of Questionnaires	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Number of questionnaires administered	400	100
Number of questionnaires not returned	5	1
Number of questionnaires retrieved	395	99
Number of invalid questionnaires (illegible)	5	1
Number of questionnaires valid for the study	390	99

Source: Field Work, 2024

The table above reveal that out of the 400 questionnaires administered to respondents, 5 respondents making 1% of the questionnaires were not returned, 395 respondents representing 99% were retrieved, 5 of the questionnaires making 1% were illegible while 390 were successfully completed and valid for proper analysis. The response rate is 99% which is a mark of excellent for the study.

DATA ANALYSIS

Research Question: *How has N-Power Programme impacted poverty reduction among beneficiaries in the Niger Delta?*

Table 3: Computation of percentage response on the impact of N-Power Programme on Poverty Reduction in the Niger Delta

Questionnaires	Gender	SA f (%)	A f (%)	D f (%)	SD f (%)	Total
The N-Power Teach programme refreshes the capacity of beneficiaries and enhances the initiatives and skills of students/pupils in socioeconomic development.	Male	80	70	20	20	190
		21%	18%	5%	5%	49%
	Female	100	50	40	10	200
		26%	13%	10%	2%	51%
	Total	180	120	60	30	390
		47%	31%	15%	7%	100%
Electronic gadgets such as computers and tablets required to transfer technological services were provided for N-Power volunteers to aid teaching while enhancing socioeconomic development.	Male	50	80	50	10	190
		13%	21%	13%	2%	49%
	Female	60	100	20	20	200
		15%	26%	5%	5%	51%
	Total	110	180	70	30	390
		28%	47%	18%	7%	100%
The N-Power Health programme enhances capacity development of medical volunteers to become practitioners in socioeconomic development.	Male	95	80	15	0	190
		24%	21%	4%	0%	49%
	Female	35	130	30	5	200
		9%	33%	8%	1%	51%
	Total	130	210	45	5	390
		33%	54%	12%	1%	100%
The N-Power Knowledge programme has impacted volunteers on skill acquisition and technical services in socioeconomic development.	Male	65	95	15	15	190
		17%	24%	4%	4%	49%
	Female	70	105	15	10	200
		18%	27%	4%	2%	51%
	Total	135	200	30	25	390
		35%	51%	4%	6%	100%
N-Power engenders job creation mechanism and reduces unemployment through the N-Power Agro programme in socioeconomic development.	Male	65	100	20	5	190
		17%	26%	5%	1%	49%
	Female	110	90	0	0	200
		28%	23%	0%	0%	51%
	Total	175	200	20	5	390
		45%	49%	5%	1%	100%

Source: Field Work, 2024.

Table 3 shows the views of respondents on the impact of N-Power programme on poverty reduction in the Niger Delta region. In their views on whether N-Power Teach programme refreshes the capacity of beneficiaries and enhances the initiatives and skills of students/pupils in socio-economic development, the table shows that 180 respondents which represent 46% of the 390 respondents strongly agreed with 120 respondents representing 31% agreed that N-Power Teach programme refreshes the capacity of beneficiaries and enhances the initiatives and skills of students/pupils in socio-economic development. However, 60 (15%) "disagreed" while 30 (8%) "strongly disagreed" that N-Power Teach programme refreshes the capacity of beneficiaries and enhances the initiatives and skills of students/pupils in socioeconomic development. This infers that N-Power Teach programme refreshes the capacity of beneficiaries and enhances the initiatives and skills of students/pupils in socioeconomic development.

The table also reveals that 110 (28%) and 180 (46%) respondents confirmed to "strongly agreed" and "agreed" that electronic gadgets such as computers and tablets required to transfer technological services were provided for N-Power volunteers to aid teaching while enhancing socio-economic development. 70 respondents representing 18% disagreed with 30 respondents which represents 8% strongly disagreed with the claim that electronic gadgets such as computers and tablets required to transfer technological services were provided for N-Power volunteers to aid teaching while enhancing socio-economic development. It indicates that electronic gadgets such as computers and tablets required to transfer technological services were provided for N-Power volunteers to aid teaching while enhancing socioeconomic development.

On whether the N-Power Health programme enhances capacity development of medical volunteers to become practitioners in socioeconomic development, 130 (33%) respondents strongly agreed, with 120 respondents representing 54% agreed that the N-Power Health programme enhances capacity development of medical volunteers to become practitioners in socioeconomic development. While 45 respondents represent 12% disagreed with 5 respondents representing 1% strongly disagreed. This implies that the N-Power Health programme enhances capacity development of medical volunteers to become practitioners in socioeconomic development.

On whether the N-Power Knowledge programme has impacted volunteers on skill acquisition and technical services in socioeconomic development, the table above shows that 135 (35%) respondents strongly agreed and 200 (51%) agreed that the N-Power Knowledge programme has impacted volunteers on skill acquisition and technical services in socioeconomic development. 30 representing 8% and 25 representing 6% of the respondents state that the N-Power Knowledge programme has impacted volunteers on skill acquisition and technical services in socioeconomic development. This implies that the N-Power Knowledge programme has impacted volunteers on skill acquisition and technical services in socioeconomic development.

The question of whether N-Power engenders job creation mechanism and reduces unemployment through the N-Power Agro programme in socioeconomic development, the table above also displays 175 respondents representing 45% "strongly agreed" and 190 which represents 49% "agreed" that N-Power engenders job creation mechanism and reduces unemployment through the N-Power Agro programme in socioeconomic development. 20 respondents which represent 5% disagreed while 5 respondents with 1% strongly disagreed on N-Power engenders job creation mechanism and reduces unemployment through the N-Power Agro programme in socioeconomic development. The majority of the respondents strongly agreed that the N-Power programme engenders job creation, skill acquisition, knowledge enhancement and reduces unemployment in the Niger Delta.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The impact of N-Power programme on poverty reduction among beneficiaries in the Niger Delta region: The result of data analysis revealed that 300 respondents representing 77% subscribed to the view that N-Power programme refreshes the capacity of beneficiaries and enhances the initiatives and skills of students/pupils in socio-economic development while 90 respondents representing 23% disagreed.

Findings also revealed that electronic gadgets such as computers and tablets required to transfer technological services were provided for N-Power batch A volunteers to aid teaching while enhancing socio-economic development. These findings were supported by 290 respondents representing 74% while only 100 respondents representing 26% disagreed with the claim. Furthermore, 340 respondents representing 87% agreed that the N-Power Health programme enhances capacity development of medical volunteers to become practitioners in socioeconomic development while 50 respondents representing 13% disagreed. Similarly, 335 respondents representing 83% agreed that the N-Power Knowledge programme has impacted volunteers on skill acquisition and technical services in socioeconomic development while 55 respondents representing 14% disagreed. It was also agreed by 365 respondents representing 62% that N-Power engenders job creation mechanism and reduces unemployment through the N-Power Agro programme in socioeconomic development while 25 respondents representing 14% disagreed with the claim. The result from the data analysis corresponds with the calculations and shows chi-square value which was calculated at 1.621 while the table value is (7.81) at 0.05% degree of freedom implies that N-Power programme have significant impact on the residents of the Niger Delta since majority of the respondents revealed that the programme refreshes the capacity of beneficiaries and enhances the initiatives and skills of students/pupils in socioeconomic development.

In line with responses of some of the beneficiaries, N-Power official revealed that:

> Electronic gadgets such as computers and tablets required to transfer technological services into knowledge-based economy were provided for N-Power volunteers to aid teaching while enhancing socio-economic development. The N-Power Health programme enhances capacity development of medical volunteers to become practitioners in socioeconomic development. The N-Power Knowledge programme has impacted volunteers on skill acquisition and technical services in socioeconomic development. N-Power engenders job creation mechanism and reduces unemployment through the N-Power Agro programme in socioeconomic development (P. Nweke, personal communication, March 25, 2024)

The information above was corroborated by Yakubu, Nuhu, Musa and Rufai (2023) who claimed that the N-Power is a scheme under the National Social Investments Programme of the Nigerian federal government geared towards job creation; alleviate poverty and empowerment initiatives through volunteering services. It is also aimed at imbibing on Nigerian youths the learn-work entrepreneurship culture between the ages of 18-35 (FGN 2018). The programme aimed to target young graduates to reduce the increasing rate of unemployment, criminalities, hunger rate, wide spread poverty and further develop the capacity of these graduates and non-graduates to be self-engage in economic activities that would enhance their socioeconomic development. According to Damilola (2019), the goals of the programme include:

> Reducing the rate of unemployment amongst graduates in the country, facilitate the transfer of entrepreneurial, technical skills and employability ability and to bring active solution to the public service in government diversification policy, train young graduates to become agroprenuer and boost food supplies to support the economy through the N-Agro scheme, enhance technical skills through the introduction of N-Power Build, N-Power Tech, and N-Power Knowledge (p.24)

Akujuru and Enyioko (2019) has meanwhile reaffirmed the key N-Power Programmes to include: N-Power Agro, N-Power Tax, N-Power Build, N-Power Creative, N-Power Health, N-Power Teach, N-Power Tech Hardware and N-Power Tech Software. These components were for the purpose of enhancing socioeconomic development of graduate manpower resources in Nigeria. According to them:

> N-Teach beneficiaries under this sub scheme serve in public schools as auxiliary teachers for a period not less than two years subject to modification by the appropriate authority. The aim is to help the beneficiaries gain relevant work experience and mould the better for further challenges as may be determine by the political and economic climate. Volunteers under this group were deployed to serve as public health assistants in government owned health facilities as well as provide basic health diagnostic services in the area of primary assignment. Those deployed under the N-Agro subcomponent serve as researchers and the local farmers in a bit to educate them on contemporary farming techniques and innovation to boost agricultural productivity thereby achieving the objective of food sufficiency (p.13).

They revealed that the N-Power Volunteer Corps is the post-tertiary engagement initiative for Nigerians between 18 and 35. It is a paid volunteering programme of a 2-year duration. The graduates were deployed to undertake their primary tasks in identified public services within their proximate communities. All N-Power Volunteers were entitled to computing devices that will contain information necessary for their specific engagement, as well as information for their continuous training and development. In realizing the effort to improve on socioeconomic development, the Federal Government in 2016, reaffirm its support towards skill acquisition, stressing that knowledge and skills are the driving forces of any socioeconomic development. This further spurred the federal government to engage 200,000 N-Power Volunteers out of which 40,000 were engaged in the Niger Delta region at first phase. In 2017, the Federal Government enlisted 300,000 more making a total of 500,000 in the Nigeria while about 90,000 were engaged in the Niger Delta region (Bennel, 2017). The evidences provided by the authors above are indications that the federal government's N-Power programme is a life-transforming anti-poverty scheme aimed at alleviating poverty amongst youths or young graduates to raise money, enhance their skills, and boost socioeconomic development of the people while improving on the revenue based in increasing government budgetary profile.

Another N-Power staff who made some levels of contributions to the discourse thus revealed that:

> N-Power is also linked to the Federal Government's policies in the economic, empowerment and social development arenas. N-Power addresses the challenges of youth unemployment by providing a structure for large scale and relevant work skills acquisition and development while linking its core and outcomes to fixing inadequate public services and stimulating the larger economy. The modular programmes under N-Power ensures that each participant will learn and practice most of what is necessary to find or create work. The N-Power Volunteer Corp involves a massive deployment of 500,000 trained graduates who assist to improve the inadequacies in our public services in education, health and civic education (S. Aya-Gift, personal communication, March 29, 2024)

Reacting to the above, the Federal Ministry of Youth Development (2019) noted that some of these graduates help in actualizing Nigeria's economic and strategic aspirations of achieving food security and self-sufficiency. The vehicle for driving this laudable vision is the N-Power scheme. It is a platform for diversifying the economy. The ministry claimed that N-Power has prepared young Nigerians for a knowledge economy where they are equipped with world-class skills and certification, and become innovators and movers in the domestic and global markets. Nigeria has gotten a pool of software developers, hardware service professionals, animators and graphic artists, building services professionals, artisans and others. N-Power also focuses on providing our non-graduates with relevant technical and business skills that enhance their work outlook and livelihood. It is opined, according to Akhakpe (2018) that the essence of every government is to realize the political, social and economic interests of its people,

Modern governments have made one of their main objectives, the promotion or pursuit of the welfare and well-being of their peoples. For this reason, policies and programmes are initiated and implemented.

The study has shown that N-Power is fairly informed on the requirement of socioeconomic development. Particularly interesting is the strong agreement by most of the respondents that the N-Power creates an entirely new venture by utilising local resources for the purpose of socioeconomic development. The role of N-Power in reducing wastage of local resources, create employment, improve the standard of living and help in socioeconomic wealth creation are well appreciated in the Niger Delta region. These findings are important because they represent the processes that bring about socioeconomic development. Obviously, they appear to endorse the contention of Okonkwo (2018) when he wrote that stakeholders in socioeconomic development now see entrepreneurship as a strategic development intervention that could accelerate socioeconomic development. The development of a country is a choice made by government, non-governmental agencies and its people, who situate and live in either urban or socioeconomic areas.

Responding to the above, Idakwoji (2015) reveals that N-Power possesses both positive and negative qualities in socioeconomic development. He therefore advises that N-Power must effectively use these positive qualities like risk taking, decision making, planning, self-confidence, creativity, uniqueness, futuristic, drive and energy to overcome the negative qualities such as arrogance for business success in socioeconomic development. When N-Power effectively combine these qualities, they are able to perform useful functions. Indeed, N-Power could be seen as a project of the federal government using the processes and methods of entrepreneurship to exploit untapped potential of socioeconomic areas, to bring about growth and development. Okonkwo (2018) describes N-Power as:

> A force that mobilises other resources to meet unmet market demand, the ability to create and build something from practically nothing, the process of creating value by pooling together a unique package of resources to exploit an opportunity. This process is usually enhanced by the government through its agencies practically the N-Power programme through her poverty alleviation programme (p.65)

Igbani and Lloyd (2021) highlight some pro-development functions of N-Power such as identification of investment opportunities, formation and nurturing of enterprises, assembling and coordinating of resources (human and material), invention, innovation, risk bearing, decision making, etc. These functions according to them are not left only for entrepreneurs in the urban areas but also for beneficiaries of the programme. The strategic role N-Power play in socioeconomic development is finding investment opportunities in the socioeconomic areas and appears to have caught the attention of policymakers and development experts. Okonkwo (2018) notes that institutions and individuals promoting socioeconomic development now see N-Power as a strategic development intervention that could accelerate the socioeconomic development process of the people.

Reacting to Okonkwo's claim, another beneficiary noted as follows:

> Clearly, N-Power is seen as a vehicle for improving the quality of life for individuals, families and communities as well as to sustain a healthy economy and environment. He stresses that to accelerate economic development in socioeconomic areas, it is necessary to increase the supply of manpower who will take risks and engage in the uncertainties of new venture creation (H. Aghogho, personal communication, April 8, 2024)

However, it is evidence according to Surajo, Umar, Musa and Haruna (2018) that past and present governments in Nigeria have launched several programmes, policies and institutions in an attempt to improve the living standard of the poor and the low-income group. These programmes were geared towards improving basic social services, infrastructures, agriculture, housing and increasing access to credit facilities as well as creating employment opportunities. However, there are lots of challenges of

poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria, which is inimical to the nations' sustainable development. In agreement with these authors, some of the beneficiaries also identified some areas where the N-Power programme has not demonstrated enough commitment to the envisioned objectives.

Responding to the above, Okonkwo (2018) revealed that despite the beautiful aims of the programme, young graduates were still seen roaming the streets of the Niger Delta in search of sustainable jobs that would enhance their socioeconomic lives. This suggests that the N-Power programme has encounter some forms of hiccups that have prevented its smooth implementation. This has been the case of past poverty alleviation programmes embarked upon by the government. That is why an N-Power beneficiary who supported the above claim revealed that:

> With high level of unemployment, harnessing Nigeria's young demography through appropriate skill development provides an opportunity to achieve inclusion and productivity within the country but poverty alleviation programmes such as the N-Power programme have always remained a mere political slogan or statement. After several months of launching the programme of poverty alleviation for the public benefit, it will be abandoned and people assigned to manage the programme misuse it by turning the programme into their own personal benefit at the expense of the government (P. Chidera, personal communication, April 12, 2024).

Also, a beneficiary of the programme revealed that:

> Another issue encountered in the management of the N-Power programme was staff uncultured attitude and lack of proper funding on the part of the government. The coordinators at the state and local government levels have turned the exercise into their own personal property and they do and undo at the stage of servicing the people. When they (N-Power official) call for verification, they often request for bribe with impunity; sometimes harass or intimidate volunteers to withhold their stipends. To me, this is an aberration (O. Ikpomwonsa, personal communication, April 15, 2024)

In the light of the above, Jacob, Ugben and Akujuru (2024) noted that the unavailability of reliable population data as a benchmark for proper planning makes it very difficult for proper implementation of poverty alleviation programmes such as the N-Power programme. The government requires a number of people in absolute poverty from each and every local government in order to carefully plan a programme aimed at alleviating the poverty of the masses. Therefore, an up-to-date population census is required so as to know the exact number of the poor people in the country, so that the government will budget for their requirements in terms of poverty alleviation. People are reluctant to accept any poverty alleviation programmes that involve agriculture. The majority of the people, especially the urban poor preferred paying money in cash as an alternative to participating in agriculture to fight poverty. This sort of money given in some programmes did not alleviate poverty of the poor, but rather aggravate their poverty condition. The authors stressed that these are some of the conundrum poverty alleviation programmes faces.

Taking the above clue, another respondent revealed that:

> Political instability, ethnic and militancy, restiveness and lack of confidence in sustainable democracy is another threat to poverty alleviation and improved quality of life in Nigeria's region. Failure of transparency and accountability on the levels of governance and the N-Power programme did not boost the socioeconomic lives of the people. The recent change of government has not been able to pay all outstanding allowances to N-Power volunteers. This, to me is the height of corruption particularly when public officials are the perpetrators (K. Obidike, personal

communication, April 19, 2024).

Obadan (2017) claimed that the departure of investors from the country added to the escalation in poverty level among the teeming population, since government is a conspirator, the government alone cannot alleviate poverty in the country. He noted that poor infrastructural development hinders economic expansion and poverty reduction. He stressed that the level of infrastructure development in Nigeria falls below average. Inadequate macro-economic management policies in Nigeria resulted in an unpleasant shift in economic activity. The region's structural shift occurred when undue concentration was given to crude oil to the neglect of agriculture. This has led to mass poverty with the consequent rural-urban drift in the Niger Delta. The incidence of corruption has taken a frightening dimension to the extent that N-Power and the places of primary assignments now demand for bribe to help cover the duty of N-Power volunteers. With this kind of practice, the N-Power is seen as platform for receiving stipends and allowances, not for genuine graduates who wish for higher aspiration.

In the light of the foregoing discussion, it is however glaring that 80% of the respondents revealed that though, there are enough impact of N-Power programme on poverty reduction in the Niger Delta but the successes recorded in the programme have been challenged by bribery, lack of funding, intimidation and harassment of volunteers by N-Power officials, delay in payment, militancy and political instability in many hostile environments in the Niger Delta. The position of the respondents has further been corroborated by the Multidimensional Poverty Index (2022) report of the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). The report sheds light on the staggering number of people living in multidimensional poverty in Nigeria's oil-rich Niger Delta region, comprising states such as Akwa Ibom, Rivers, Cross River, Edo, Delta, and Bayelsa. The figures are nothing short of alarming and raise serious questions about the effective use of resources and policy implementation in these states. The report reveals that Akwa Ibom, Rivers, and Cross River states are the hardest hit, with 5.08 million, 4.4 million, and 3.44 million people respectively living in multidimensional poverty. For Akwa Ibom state, this represents over 71 percent of its total population of 5.451 million people estimated by the National Population Commission (NPC).

Similarly, in Rivers State, the 4.4 million people living in multidimensional poverty account for 62.4 percent of the state's estimated 7.47 million inhabitants. Cross River State also struggles significantly, with 3.44 million people living in multidimensional poverty, constituting a staggering 75.6 percent of the state's population. While Edo and Delta States also face challenges, their numbers are relatively lower compared to the states mentioned earlier. Edo has 1.4 million people living in multidimensional poverty, representing 35.4 percent of its estimated 3.9 million population, while Delta has 2.73 million people in poverty, which is just under 50 percent of its population. Bayelsa State emerges as the most concerning case, with a shocking 2.61 million people living in multidimensional poverty, constituting a staggering 88 percent of the state's estimated 2.9 million inhabitants. The Niger Delta states, despite receiving significant funds from the federation account (N87.13 billion in 2021), faces a severe challenge in improving the living standards of its people.

The report revealed that the 13 percent derivation funds, intended to ensure that resource-rich regions benefit from their natural resources, have been a subject of scrutiny. Many analysts and policymakers question why these funds have failed to uplift the living standards of the people in these states. Despite receiving substantial financial support, poverty persists and worsens with the rising cost of living, magnified by increases in fuel prices and the depreciation of the naira, the national currency against major international currencies especially the US dollars.

In spite of the challenges identified above, the study revealed that N-Power Teach programme refreshes the capacity of beneficiaries and enhances the initiatives and skills of students/pupils in socio-economic development. Findings also revealed that electronic gadgets such as computers and tablets required to transfer technological services were provided for N-Power volunteers to aid teaching while enhancing socio-economic development. Furthermore, N-Power Health programme enhances capacity development of medical volunteers to become practitioners in socioeconomic development and that the N-Power Knowledge programme has impacted volunteers on skill acquisition and technical services in

socioeconomic development. It was also found that N-Power engenders job creation mechanism and reduces unemployment through the N-Power Agro programme in socioeconomic development. The result has further been confirmed by our test of hypothesis one (1) using chi-square value which was calculated at 1.621 while the critical value tabulated was (7.81) at 0.05% level of significance. In a nutshell, N-Power programme have significantly impact on the residents of the Niger Delta since it is revealed that the programme had refreshed the capacity of beneficiaries, provided stipends, even if it comes irregularly but enhanced the initiatives and skills of students/pupils in socioeconomic development.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the N-Power programme's impact on poverty reduction and socioeconomic development in the Niger Delta, concluding that while there is a significant relationship between the programme and poverty alleviation, this relationship is notably weak. Beneficiaries reported enhancements in educational and healthcare skills, increased income levels, and improvements in their overall quality of life due to the programme. Additionally, N-Power has facilitated social interactions and entrepreneurial opportunities among beneficiaries. Despite all these, the paper noted several challenges that impede the programme's effectiveness, including poor coordination by N-Power officials and the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, inadequate funding, irregular stipend payments, and issues such as bribery and mismanagement. These factors contribute to a lack of transparency and poor government performance, ultimately undermining the programme's potential.

The findings suggest that while there is a foundational basis for positive impact, the overall effectiveness of the N-Power programme is compromised by structural and operational deficiencies.

Based on the above, the paper calls for enhanced local and state government involvement in poverty alleviation efforts, emphasizing the need for accurate data collection and collaborative strategies that empower communities. Such measures are essential not only for improving the programme's implementation but also for addressing broader issues like crime and ecological degradation in the region. In summary, the study highlights both the potential and the current limitations of the N-Power programme in driving meaningful socioeconomic progress in the Niger Delta.

In addition to enhancing the involvement of state and local governments, it is essential to implement a rigorous monitoring and evaluation framework for the N-Power programme. This framework should focus on key performance indicators that assess not only the financial aspects but also the impact of the programme on beneficiaries' livelihoods and community engagement. Regular feedback sessions with beneficiaries can be incorporated to gather insights and recommendations for improvement.

Furthermore, increasing transparency in the administration of the N-Power programme can significantly contribute to its success. Implementing a digital platform for tracking payments, project milestones, and beneficiary feedback could help mitigate issues related to bribery and mismanagement. This platform should be accessible to stakeholders, including beneficiaries, government officials, and independent observers, to enhance accountability and trust in the programme. Such transparency will not only improve public perception and confidence in the programme but will also increase the likelihood of attracting additional funding and support from both governmental and non-governmental organizations committed to poverty reduction in the Niger Delta.

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