

**ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF BUHARI ADMINISTRATION'S
N-POWER PROGRAM AND YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT AND POVERTY
REDUCTION IN ENUGU STATE, 2015- 2023**

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Abstract

This paper assessed the implementation of Buhari administration's N-Power program and youth unemployment and poverty reduction in Enugu State (2015-2023). Ex-post facto research design was adopted for the study. Two hypotheses were posed to guide the study. Multi-stage sampling procedure and purposive sampling technique were used to draw 158 respondents as sample. Primary and secondary data were used to support sources of data collection for the study. A structured Questionnaire was designed to elicit information from the respondents which in the end, only 124 correctly completed questionnaires were analyzed. Mean and Chi-Square analysis were done. $\bar{X} \geq / \leq 3.00$ were set as the acceptance/rejection region while the χ^2 was tested at 0.05% significance level. Unstructured interview was also conducted to elicit further information from some of the participants. With respect to the first hypothesis the results showed that the N-Power program's job creation opportunities did not help to reduce youth unemployment and poverty in Enugu State (2015-2023). With respect to the second hypothesis, the results showed that corruption, nonchalant attitude of the participants, among others was challenges the N-Power program encountered in youth empowerment, poverty and unemployment reduction in Enugu State (2015-2023). It therefore concluded that the program did not substantially help in reducing youth unemployment and poverty in the state from 2015 to 2023. It recommended that government while embarking on such program in future should: design

training programs that are tailored to the specific needs and demands of the contemporary and future times and labour market; establish a robust monitoring and evaluation system to track the progress and impact of such program; provide post-program support to the beneficiaries to enhance their transition into the workforce; ensure that adequate fund is made available for the implementation of such program with mechanisms put in place to track the funds, among others.

Keywords: Assessment, Implementation, N-Power Program, Job Creation, Youth Poverty, Unemployment Reduction

Introduction

Undoubtedly, the N-Power program was well-known and sparked variety of debates about its efficiency in achieving its intended target. The rationale for the program as intended by the Federal Government that instituted it (Obadan, 2017), was to significantly lower youth unemployment and poverty in Nigeria by empowering the youth through creating jobs within the Social Investment Program. While it lasted, the N-Power program had as its main goal: to give Nigeria's young graduates and non-graduates the self-sustaining abilities, resources, and even opportunities in order to move from one degree of empowerment to the next; from one level of entrepreneurship and invention to the next; and to address blatant abject poverty as well. Thus, it is also a program to reduce poverty (Onehi, 2023).

The founders of the N-Power program divided it into three categories: Graduate Teachers Corps, which sought to hire 500,000 graduates; N-Power Knowledge, which sought to hire 25,000 non-graduates; and N-Power Build, which sought to hire 75,000 non-graduates – possibly as another sign that it was meant to address the difficulties associated with emancipation from unemployment and poverty (Nwaobi, 2019). As intended, the 500,000 graduates of the N-Power Corps program would receive computer equipment that include both the data they need for their unique engagement and the information they needed for development and growth so as to get free from poverty.

Due to the rising unemployment rates in Africa, no country in the continent can claim to have totally eradicated poverty. Statistics had it that youth unemployment rate in Nigeria increased from 14.23% in Q4 2016 to 33.28% in Q4 of 2020 (Sasu, 2022). Nigeria's youth unemployment rate surged from 3.83% in the last quarter of 2022 (37.7%) to 4.2% in the 2nd quarter of 2023 and 5.0% (40.6%) in the 3rd quarter of 2023 representing a significant

increase of 0.8% from the 2nd quarter of 2023. The rate of unemployment among persons with post-secondary education was 7.8% in Q3, 2023 (Premium Times, 2024). In the same vein, in 2017, two years after Buhari took over; the unemployment rate in Enugu state was 20.5%. It later dropped to 18.7% in the third quarter of 2018 but the figure rose to 31.62% in the fourth quarter of 2020, an increase of almost 50% in three years (Agbo, 2023). The 2019 poverty headcount ratio of 58.13% for Enugu state, the highest in the Southeast after second placed Ebonyi state (41.38 %), left the state just a little above national average. The figure only significantly dropped to 37.3% in 2022, a difference of about 20.93% within three years under Buhari administration (Premium Times, 2024).

The problems of poverty and unemployment are not viewed or taken lightly anytime in Nigeria due to the devastating effects it has on the country's social, political, and economic life. Unemployment has resulted in many socio-economic issues and pandemics among the youth in Nigeria such as immorality, prostitution, violence, stealing, banditry, terrorism, lower GDP, poverty, minor crimes, drug abuse, among other things (Kayode, Arome and Anyio, 2023). Different administrations and regimes in Nigeria have laboured to develop specific plans, programs, and policies, all intended to solve the pressing socio-economic problems of poverty through creating employment opportunities as unemployment has contributed to Nigeria's struggle with poverty (Okogba, 2017). The corruption and improper use of public funds that have led to this predicament of pervasive poverty results from the government's incapacity to offer programs that empower citizens, such as work possibilities (Kayode, Arome and Anyio, 2023).

Unemployment is one of the major developmental issues affecting emerging countries like Nigeria (Kayode, 2014). Youths are particularly affected by unemployment, which appears to be constantly rising in Nigeria. This is widespread within the graduate working population age that makes up a sizeable portion of the population (ILO, 2022). Over half of the Nigeria citizens between the ages of 18 and 29; and Africans between the ages of 15 and 35 most of whom are graduates, are still dependent as they are either unemployed or structurally underemployed, (United Nations Population Fund, 2023; Nigeria Bureau of Statistics, 2016; Tunji, 2014; National Population Commission, 2013). Additionally, according to a 2023 estimate by the World Bank, Nigeria's graduate youth unemployment rate will hit 59.7% by 2030 if the governments do not seriously address the issue of job creation.

The Federal Government under Muhammadu Buhari(2015-2023) implemented the N-Power program to address the issues of poverty, unemployment and lack of empowerment among the Nigerian youths. This initiative came after others that previous governments had supported to reduce poverty, including establishing the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), the People's Bank of Nigeria (PBN), and the National Board for Community Banks (NBCB). The Buhari's government had solicited help from some types of volunteers, in the implementation of the N-Power initiative through providing some services on behalf of the government (N-Power Information Guide, 2017).

N-Power program was launched on June 8, 2016, with the goal of reducing youth unemployment and empowerment, poverty reduction and fostering social development (Okogba, 2017). The program was created for the benefit of graduates and non-graduates who are between the ages of 18 and 35 and are unemployed. The objective of this funded, two-year initiative was to involve beneficiaries in development of their home state (Premium Times, 2016). To achieve this, the federal government invested so much money in the program. Thus, on July 13, 2019, it was disclosed that, the government had well spent \$279 billion in total between December 2016 and June 2019 to pay the program recipients or participants, who are primarily young people (Agbakwuru, 2019).

The system was divided into six categories: N-Teach, N-Health, N-Agro, N-Build, N-Creative, and N-Tech. For N-Teach and N-Health, only graduates who have successfully completed the required one-year NYSC program were eligible to apply, but for the N-Agro, N-Build, N-Creative, and N-Tech, both graduates and non-graduates were eligible to apply (Onehi, 2023). With emphasis on Nigerian youth empowerment and poverty alleviation, the Federal Government later in 2021 introduced the N-Knowledge category of N-Power. The programme was aimed at helping young people to acquire marketable and employable computer hardware skills. To that effect, 1,500 youths were effectively trained by N-Power, and each recipient received supplies like computers, printers, internet accessories, among other accessories.

Key areas of the N-Power program include: the N-Power volunteers who were expected to carry out the following obligations: teaching, instructional, and advisory services. These volunteers were expected to carry out those obligations in the four (4) key areas of N-Power Teach, N-Power Health, Voluntary Asset and Income Declaration Scheme, and N-Power Agro. For the N-Power Teach, it was hoped that this group of N-Power recipients would help to improve the availability of basic education in Nigeria. Since there seems to be

a personnel shortage in Nigeria's primary and secondary schools, N-Power Teach used volunteers as teaching helpers. Instead of replacing the substantive teachers, they worked as support teachers around the country, assisting with instruction, school management, and other responsibilities in the classrooms which at the end of the day, would help them gain work experience and mold them better for the work environment. Where possible, they were expected to help in funding basic education for kids living in underprivileged or neglected areas. The N-Power Teach STEM was a component of the N-Power Teach Curriculum where young graduates with experience in computer programming and other relevant fields were required to assist the Federal Government in implementing the STEM initiative (N-Power Information Guide, 2017).

Similarly, the N-Agro beneficiaries were meant to offer advice to farmers all through the nation. They were expected to share the expertise the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development have accumulated in the field of extension services. They were to also collect information on Nigeria's agricultural resources. Youth who have taken courses related to agriculture in the tertiary institutions were welcome in this space. These participants were also expected to serve as intermediaries between researchers and farmers to help them with tips for better farming practices to make Nigeria self-sufficient in terms of food production and processing. Their post-tertiary qualifications were Higher National Diploma, Ordinary National Diploma in Nutrition, Agricultural Sciences, Crop Sciences, Food Science and Technology, and other related disciplines (N-Power Information Guide, 2017).

Furthermore, the Voluntary Asset and Income Declaration Scheme (VAIDS) component of the program was meant to encourage tax payers to voluntarily disclose their genuine income and assets in order to encourage individuals who are not paying their fair share of taxes and those who are only partially paying them to do so. The N-Power VAIDS volunteers' primary responsibilities as community tax liaison officers included tax promotion, document review, record keeping, answering online inquiries, customer management, and report writing. This vital industry drew young people with tertiary degrees in Computer and Information Science-related fields (Agbo, 2023).

The N-Power Health participants served as public health assistants trained by professionals to provide basic health diagnostic services in their deployed areas. N-Power Health post qualification was in any of the following courses: Community Health Extension, Nursing, Midwifery, Medical Laboratory Technology, Pharmacy Technology, Medical Records, Health Education, Environmental Health Technology, Microbiology, Biochemistry

and Agricultural Science, JCHEW, SCHEW, NABTEB, Ordinary National Diploma, B. Technology, B.Sc., and other allied disciplines. On the same note, N-Power Community were members that were chosen in those areas and deployed to serve as instructors in such areas as Adult educators and civic educators who later merged with N-Teach (Agbo, 2023; N-Power Information Guide, 2017).

The Non-Graduate category of the N-Power encompasses the N-Power Creative which is meant to engage 5,000 young people to train them and bring out the creativity in them so that they could become exporters of world-class services (N-Power Information Guide, 2017). The participants were trained in the following: animation, graphics design, post-production and scriptwriting. The training was for three (3) months (1-month theory, 2-month projects), after which participants were engaged in internship opportunities at home and/or abroad, and linked for job and market opportunities. Specifically, the N-Power Tech Hardware was to inject 10,000 Nigerian youths into Information Communication Technology (ICT) industry by training them to be hardware technicians. This was practically oriented and participants learned to service and manufacture technology hardware like mobile phones, tablets, computers, and other technology hardware. The training program run for four (4) months - 3 months training while the remaining 1 month went for assessment, graduation, and setup. The N-Power Tech Software trained 10,000 Nigerian youths as software developers for local and international markets (Olawole, 2022). The N-Power Tech was open to graduates from all tertiary institutions including Colleges of Education, Polytechnics, and equivalents.

Undoubtedly, education (the imparting of life skills), entrepreneurial training (exposing them to a variety of crafts, occupations, and professions), and indoctrination (instilling in them a self-sustaining conscience) are the three essential key components of empowerment (Emejuru, 2022). In order to at least lower unemployment and poverty, it would have been more appropriate that the N-Power program in Nigeria, as an empowerment scheme, should have only been entrepreneurial. However, the rising rate of youth unemployment and pervasive poverty among the participants in the program in Nigeria and notably in Enugu State demonstrates the fact that the program did not successfully realize its goal of fostering entrepreneurship, job creation, youth empowerment and poverty reduction. Many queries have been posed, including: were there issues in the initiative that the government and N-Power program coordinators did not manage effectively, or could it be the participant's attitude that should be blamed for the failure?

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

This study adopted the Empowerment and Unemployment theoretical frameworks. The empowerment theory was first propounded by Julianne H. Najel a researcher in the field of community development and empowerment in 1981. Empowerment theory (Perkins and Zimmerman, 2021) is a conceptual framework based on both a value orientation for working in the community and a theoretical model for understanding the process and consequences of efforts to exert control and influences over decision that affects one's life. It is an approach that sees the degree of autonomy and self-determination in people and community. The Unemployment theory on the other hand was propounded by Pigon in 1993. In it he stated that apart from frictional obstructions, unemployment would be none existent if it were not for the fact that wage-earners habitually stipulates and insist on wage rates higher than the equilibrium level. The tenets of the theory is that in unemployment reduction programs there should be the drive to: reduce rate of youth unemployment by linking interested volunteers to address observed gaps that is paramount; stimulate productivity and growth (of rural communities); increases access to education and health services which gives room for empowering of vulnerable sectors; ensures that funds could be provided to take care of poor and vulnerable households with access to income (livelihood); capture the identities of unregistered and vulnerable groups for proper planning; and provide access to financial services to increase rate of financial inclusion.

Relating this theory to this study, government is viewed as a system with inputs coming from the masses in the form of demands for empowerment schemes for self-reliance and increase in income status, as well as; job creation by the government for the overall benefit of the youth. The government serves as the processing unit which takes inputs in form of demands from the people for employment and empowerment scheme, processes them, and send out outputs which according to the tenets of the above theory are achievable through the N-Power scheme by gearing it towards job creation, skill acquisition scheme and poverty reduction among the youth. The theory shows how the government could react to people's plight in terms of the provision of the necessities of life and also highlights how demands of the peoples are presented to government, assessment or evaluation of government actions on these demands and the output of government actions in the form of programs that will enhance the well-being of the people such as the N-Power Program.

By and large, the growing concern of many Nigerians had always been with the general impact of social investment programs on poverty and unemployment reduction

(Olashile, 2023). Many have identified the need to make every social investment policy inclusive so as to incorporate high numbers of vulnerable and less privileged in the society which the government did not pay attention to while others emphasized on what a good social investment policy should address (Emejuru, 2022). Few individuals have assessed the activities of the N-Power program and the efficiency of the program in reducing youth unemployment and eradicating poverty in Nigeria (Agbo, 2023). Little effort has also been put in to assess the program's ability to provide a structure for large scale and relevant work skills acquisition and development and to ensure that each participant learned and practiced most of what is necessary to find or create work that would empower them (Okike and Ngonadi, 2017). Also few, if any, have looked critically at the N-Power program to identify how satisfied the beneficiaries were in participating in the program; how the program had helped in reducing unemployment and some of the challenges the program implementation encountered (Bello, 2022); which this study aims to address.

Despite being in place for years from the beginning of the Buhari's Administration in 2015, there was no empirical evidence to show the efficacy and efficiency of the N-Power program in Enugu State in resolving the problems it aimed to solve – youth empowerment, unemployment and poverty reduction (Onehi, 2023). The program which provided a platform where most Nigerians graduate youths gained employment, accessed skills acquisition and development had little or nothing to show for after the participants were disengaged after two years of engagement (Sanni, 2023). More so, most of the participants degenerated into more critical and abject poverty situation than they were before engaging in the program (ILO, 2022). Many of them rather saw their participation in the program as waste of time owing to the fact that the two-year duration of the program was very short and not enough for them to attain proficiency in skills acquisition (Olawole, 2022). The process of selecting the participants without screening and assessing their qualifications and interests in the program was equally questioned, faulted and blamed for the program's failure (Agbo, 2023). Other areas where critical questions has been raised against the program include: the program not properly designed to meet international and local job markets and needs; the program and the participants not periodically monitored and evaluated to ensure quality and compliance; and, the stipends paid which most times didn't come regularly not being what would afford them opportunity to save for their future endeavours (Emejuru, 2022). Thus, most of the participants were deplorably left on their own, not capable and well equipped enough to establish the trade they learned during the period with the government's renege on fulfilling

its promise of giving them start-up packages (Olashile, 2023; Emejuru, 2022). Thus the assertion, that the program did not significantly record visible impacts or significance on youth empowerment, unemployment and poverty reduction in Nigeria (Onuba, 2023).

The apparent lack of visible impact of the program has also been blamed on several other factors ranging from the poor attitude, gross negligence, lack of seriousness and commitment to the program by the participants and monumental corruption on the part of government officials meant to drive the program (Kayode, Arome and Anyio, 2023). They, succinctly decried that corruption which has been so rife in Nigeria, and had been evident in almost every program organized in the states of the country, and particularly when the federal government is the sponsor, undoubtedly has been the major setback of the N-Power program. Also, reacting to the above situation, Senator Ali Ndume had unequivocally asserted that the federal government's poor implementation of the N-Power program due to corruption despite claiming to have spent hundreds of billions of naira with visibly no discernible impact on youth unemployment and poverty reduction attests to the failure of the program (Sanni, 2023). On the other hand, the participants could also be held responsible for the setback as though some N-Power participants never received their payments for months (Olashile, 2023), the federal government had to dismiss 2,525 of the N-Power cardholders due to malfeasance, including as a result of their blatant truancy and absence from their assigned locations. It was a clear fact that most of the registered N-Power program participants were students pursuing one programme in the university as undergraduate or postgraduate students or have other businesses they are engaged with. They only registered with the program to be collecting what they consider as "free government money" (Onuba, 2023).

In the face of the above, the Buhari administration had been bold in their media acclaims about the program's successes and performance, despite the lack of comprehensive and verified proof (Okoro and Bassey, 2018). The administration through the Minister of Information Lai Mohammed had boasted of the program providing employment to millions of Nigerian youths and at the same time provided them enabling environment and implements for their commencement of the various trades they have learnt which invariably translated into empowering them and bringing them out of abject poverty (Olawole, 2022). The government had insisted that it was to ameliorate their plight and aid economic development among the youths in Nigeria that the World Bank group had in June 2016 granted the sum of \$5 billion International Development Assistance credit to establish the N-Power program (Bello, 2022). Also, is that the sum of \$1.3 billion was granted additionally by

the Federal Government from its budget to create this social safety net program which came to be known as the National Social Investment Program (NSIP) (Okike and Ngonadi, 2017). It had also claimed that more than 4 million people have reportedly benefited directly from financial assistance, job training and social intervention schemes of this program (NBS, 2022).

Amidst these claims and counter claims, it is not practically viable to justify any of them without performing actual study or analyses to ascertain how successfully the program had achieved its goals or objectives. Also is to find out the challenges the program encountered and to make recommendations on how in future such programs could be effectively implemented. Therefore, by generating relevant data that will support future policy reforms, redirect the focus of the Federal Government on further training programs, and enhance the well-being of future beneficiaries, this study aims at closing the information gap that existed in the implementation of N-Power scheme in Enugu State. It is in the light of this that this study examined the efficiency and significance of the N-Power program in reducing youth unemployment as a tool employed by the Buhari-led government to fight poverty, create employment opportunities and increase youth empowerment in the nation. Therefore, this study intends to achieve its aim through the following research questions:

- i. What were the impacts of the N-Power program's job creation opportunities towards reduction of youth unemployment and poverty in Enugu State, 2015-2023?
- ii. What were the challenges the N-Power program encountered towards youth empowerment and unemployment reduction in Enugu State, 2015-2023?

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to assess the implementation of N-Power program in Enugu State (2015-2023). Specifically, the study;

- i. Examined the impact of the N-Power program's job creation opportunities towards reduction of youth unemployment and poverty in Enugu State, 2015-2023
- ii. Ascertained if corruption, nonchalant attitude of the participants were challenges the N-Power program encountered towards youth empowerment and unemployment reduction in Enugu State, 2015-2023.

Hypotheses

HO₁: The N-Power program's job creation opportunities did not help to reduce youth unemployment and poverty in Enugu State, 2015-2023.

HO₂: Corruption, nonchalant attitude of the participants, among others was the challenges of the N-Power program towards youth empowerment, poverty and unemployment reduction in Enugu State, 2015-2023.

Methods

This study adopted the ex-post facto research design. The population of study was over 4,690 individuals made up of 4460 N-Power program participants in Enugu State (City Population, 2023) and 230 Staffs of Enugu State Ministry of Employment and Productivity. The study used multi-stage sampling procedure where stratified random sampling was used to stratify Enugu State into three (3) Senatorial Zones; Enugu North, Enugu West and Enugu East. From these three senatorial zones, the researchers purposively selected three (3) local governments (Udenu, Isi-Uzo and Ezeagu respectively). This was done based on the information gathered from the State office of N-Power at Enugu which indicated these Local Governments as having recorded the highest number of beneficiaries of the program. Purposive sampling technique was further deployed to randomly draw 158 respondents who were beneficiaries of the N-Power program from the three Senatorial Zones as the sample adopting the Nwana (1981) formula for sample size determination which states that 'if the population is few hundreds, a 40% or more sample will do; if many hundreds a 20% sample will do and where the population is a few thousands like ours, a 10% sample will do and if several thousands a 5% will do. Therefore, since ours is few thousands, 10% was adopted which is 158. The sample therefore consisted disproportionately (ie, irrespective of their disparity in populations) of 50 participants each from Udenu, Isi-Uzo, and Ezeagu and 8 Staffs of the Enugu State Ministry of Employment and Productivity respectively.

On data collection, primary and secondary data were extensively relied upon. Unstructured interview was conducted to elicit oral information from some of the participants. Furthermore, a structured Questionnaire containing twenty (20) items which centered on the issues of N-Power and job creation and the challenges of N-Power program implementation was designed and used to elicit information from the 158 respondents. The administration was done by the researchers with the help of three (3) Research Assistants. In the end only 124 questionnaires were returned validly completed and therefore were analyzed for the study; 34 were not returned due to the fact that some of the respondents reported

misplacing theirs while some of them were not on seat at the time of collection. Validation of the instrument was done by two (2) experts: one in Political Science and the other in Science Education, all from Enugu State University of Science and Technology. The reliability of the instrument was done through a trial testing using twelve (12) people who were not part of the sample. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was used to analyze the data to determine the internal consistency of the instrument and an overall reliability coefficient, $r = 0.83$ was obtained. Content analysis was adopted in the analysis of the secondary data while mean and chi-square was adopted in the analysis of the primary data that resulted from the questionnaire. Benchmark of $\bar{X} \geq / \leq 3.00$ are set as the acceptance/rejection region for the items and the grand mean while the χ^2 was tested at 0.05% significance level. The decision rule is: If the calculated chi-square value is less than the table value, then the null hypothesis will be accepted and if otherwise, the hypothesis will be rejected.

Results

The results of the study are presented in tables below.

Research Question I: What were the impacts of the N-Power program's job creation opportunities towards reduction of youth unemployment and poverty in Enugu State, 2015-2023?

Table 1: Response on the impacts of the N-Power program towards reduction of youth unemployment and poverty in Enugu State, 2015-2023

S/ N	Items	Frequency of Responses					$\sum fx$	N	\bar{X}	Decision
		SA (5)	A (4)	D (3)	SD (2)	U (1)				
1	Enrolment into N-Power program has increased the skills required for self-employment.	13	16	41	44	10	350	124	2.82	Rejected
2	The N-Power program guaranteed participants long term employment.	12	24	39	32	17	354	124	2.85	Rejected
3	The monthly stipend earned through the program was insufficient to raise capital for small business.	25	23	35	29	12	392	124	3.16	Accepted
4	The duration of the N-Power skill acquisition program was enough for participants to learn and perfect a skill.	15	21	34	46	8	361	124	2.91	Rejected
5	The number of participants registered in the program substantially reduced youth unemployment in the state, 2015-2023.	11	19	38	45	11	346	124	2.79	Rejected
6	The Program was a good strategy for long-term youth empowerment	16	18	26	43	21	337	124	2.72	Rejected

	and poverty reduction.									
7	Discontinuing of participants after just two years without a follow-up program did not make the program irrelevant.	10	15	37	43	19	328	124	2.65	Rejected
8	Not providing those who had accessed and acquired skills with relevant tools and financial support to start up did not diminish the gains of the program.	6	24	41	36	17	338	124	2.73	Rejected
Grand Mean = 2.83										

Field Work, 2023

The results as presented in table I above showed that except for item three, all the other views were rejected by the respondents ($\bar{X} < 3.00$) implying that the N-Power program’s job creation opportunities had no impact towards reduction of youth unemployment and poverty in Enugu State, 2015-2023 (Grand Mean of 2.83 is less than 3.00).

Hypothesis I (HO₁): The N-Power program’s job creation opportunities did not help to reduce youth unemployment and poverty in Enugu State, 2015-2023.

Table 2: Chi-square distribution test for Hypothesis One

Items	O	E	O-E	(O-E) ²	$\frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$
G	2.82	2.83	-0.01	0.0001	-3.534
H	2.85	2.83	0.02	0.0004	0.000
I	3.16	2.83	0.33	0.1089	0.038
J	2.91	2.83	0.08	0.0064	0.002
K	2.79	2.83	-0.04	0.0016	0.001
L	2.72	2.83	-0.11	0.0121	-0.004
M	2.65	2.83	-0.18	0.0324	-0.011
N	2.73	2.83	-0.10	0.010	-0.004
					$\frac{\sum(O-E)^2}{E} = -3.246$

Degree of freedom (df) = n-1

df = 8-1 =7

Level of Significance = 0.05%

χ^2 Calculated = -3.246

Critical Value at 0.05% = 14.067

The Chi-square (χ^2) calculated (-3.246) is less than the critical (table) value at 0.05% level of significance (14.067) hence HO₁ cannot be rejected but accepted. Therefore, it is correct to conclude that the N-Power program’s creation of job opportunities did not help to reduce youth unemployment and poverty in Enugu State, 2015-2023.

Research Question II: What were the challenges the N-Power program encountered towards youth empowerment, poverty and unemployment reduction in Enugu State, 2015-2023?

Table 3: Response on the challenges of N-Power program towards youth empowerment, poverty and unemployment reduction in Enugu State 2015-2023

S/ N	Items	Frequency of Responses					Σfx	N	\bar{X}	Decision
		SA (5)	A (4)	D (3)	SD (2)	U (1)				
9	Poor funding	32	41	28	18	5	449	124	3.62	Accepted
10	Inadequate Equipment/Non-designation of Training centers	8	22	42	48	4	264	124	2.13	Rejected
11	Corruption and poor implementation	44	50	12	15	3	489	124	3.94	Accepted
12	Involvement of ghost workers	38	47	19	17	3	472	124	3.81	Accepted
13	Periodic change/instability in government	28	52	35	8	1	470	124	3.79	Accepted
14	Abandonment and discontinuity in government policies	23	47	33	16	5	439	124	3.50	Accepted
15	Very poor stipend paid to participants	46	52	18	8	0	508	124	4.07	Accepted
16	Inconsistency in payment of stipend	35	48	27	12	2	474	124	3.82	Accepted
17	Poor monitoring, supervision and evaluation	16	21	37	43	7	368	124	2.97	Rejected
18	Truancy, un-seriousness and nonchalant attitude of the participants	31	49	20	21	3	456	124	3.68	Accepted
19	Short duration of the program	44	48	27	5	0	503	124	4.06	Accepted
20	Non-provision of start-up packs/tools and financial/policy support for the participants after disengagement	36	43	28	14	3	467	124	3.77	Accepted
Grand Mean = 3.60										

The results as presented in table 3 above show that except for items 10 and 17, all the other views were accepted by the respondents ($\bar{X} > 3.00$) indicating them as the challenges the N-Power program encountered towards youth empowerment, poverty and unemployment reduction in Enugu State, 2015-2023 (Grand Mean of 3.60 is greater than 3.00).

Hypothesis II (HO₂): Corruption, nonchalant attitude of the participants, among others was the challenges of the N-Power program towards youth empowerment, poverty and unemployment reduction in Enugu State, 2015-2023.

Table 4: Chi-square distribution test for Hypothesis Two

Items	O	E	O-E	(O-E) ²	(O-E) ²
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					E
O	3.62	3.60	0.02	0.000	0.000
P	2.13	3.60	-1.47	-2.161	-0.600
Q	3.94	3.60	0.34	0.116	0.032
R	3.81	3.60	0.21	0.044	0.012
S	3.79	3.60	0.19	0.036	0.010
T	3.50	3.60	-0.01	-0.01	-0.003
U	4.07	3.60	0.47	0.221	0.061
V	3.82	3.60	0.22	0.048	0.013
W	2.97	3.60	-0.63	-0.397	-0.110
X	3.68	3.60	0.08	0.006	0.002
Y	4.06	3.60	0.46	0.212	0.059
Z	3.77	3.60	0.17	0.029	0.008
					$\frac{\sum(\mathbf{O-E})^2}{\mathbf{E}} = \mathbf{-0.516}$

Degree of freedom (df) = n-1

df = 12-1 =11

Level of Significance = 0.05%

χ^2 Calculated = -0.516

Critical Value at 0.05% = 14.067

The Chi-square (χ^2) calculated (-0.516) is less than the critical (table) value at 0.05% level of significance (14.067) hence, H_0 cannot be rejected but accepted. Therefore, it is correct to conclude that Corruption, nonchalant attitude of the participants, among others was the challenges of the N-Power program towards youth empowerment, poverty and unemployment reduction in Enugu State, 2015-2023.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study with respect to hypothesis one showed that the N-Power program's creation of job opportunities did not help to reduce youth unemployment and poverty in Enugu State, 2015-2023 (Grand Mean of 2.83 is less than 3.00; Chi-square (χ^2) calculated (-3.246) is less than the critical (table) value (14.067) at 0.05% level of significance and H_0 accepted). This was due to the fact that the participants' enrolment into N-Power program could not increase their skills requirement for self-employment as the two-year duration of the program was not enough for participants to learn and perfect a skill, work, earn money and save enough fund for self-establishment. Furthermore, discontinuing of participants from the program after just two years without a follow-up program made the program irrelevant. Thus, it was poorly implemented as not providing those who had accessed the program and

acquired skills with relevant tools and financial support to start up diminished the gains of the program. Viewed from the above perspectives Okoro and Bassey (2018) maintained that had it been the N-Power program was effectively implemented, human capital boost in area of youth empowerment intended to be addressed through youth employment, would have ensured adequate skill acquisition and development of critical sectors' skills such as in education, health and agriculture - the core areas of the N-Power program. Its intention to ensure unemployment and poverty reduction through skills acquisition and development of the Nigerian youth, both educated and non-educated and to increase their minimal hope of securing jobs in future or establish their own trade or business, even at the minimal level needed to survive or raise a family would have been achieved if it had been well implemented (Onuba, 2023).

Disagreeing with the above findings, Agbo (2023) had asserted that the fact that jobs are not freely available especially in Nigeria where unemployment is high leading to increase in poverty, the beneficiaries of N-Power program having been given some level of employment opportunities which in turn reduced some level of poverty at the time of their participation in the program, should be seen as a positively remarkable effort of the Buhari administration. Supporting Agbo's assertion, Sanni, (2023) equally noted that since they also received stipend every month, the implication is that there had been some levels of reduction in unemployment no matter however minimal. An argument in line with Onehi's (2023) view that from the proceeds of the program the participants have been able to provide for their daily needs and the skills acquired must have helped some in the short and medium term, as they put them to use or rendered services to the society and earned a living from it; while some had become entrepreneurs, even though on small scale level from the skills they acquired, hence the program should not be written off as useless, time wasting and unproductive.

Furthermore, the second finding (hypothesis two) identified that corruption, nonchalant attitude of the participants, among others was some of the challenges the N-Power program encountered towards youth empowerment, poverty and unemployment reduction in Enugu State, 2015-2023 (Grand Mean of 3.60 is greater than 3.00; Chi-square (χ^2) calculated (-0.516) is less than the critical (table) value (14.067) at 0.05% level of significance and H_0 accepted). The above finding did not come as a surprise as non-payment and inconsistency in the payment of stipend on time and when due; the existence of financial capital leakage which made the available funds for the implementation of the policies not to suffice, were very much in the public domain as major challenges of the N-Power program (Olawole, 2022). The implication was that the program lacked adequate funding to achieve its goal of youth empowerment, poverty and unemployment reduction as there existed cases of embezzlement of fund for the N-Power program implementation within the system by the program implementers.

One of the N-Tech participants who was interviewed stated that what they observed was that immediately the N-Power money was released by the federal government, the officers at the states N-Power office went ahead to use part of the money to buy some SUV vehicles, branded them N-Power Project Vehicles and were cruising around with them. Another participant interviewed stated that he trained as a computer repairer and that he had expected the N-Power officials to be visiting them at their locations with the SUV vehicles they had bought and branded for the project implementation but that they did not for once visit him at his training center while they were assigned to some field officers for supervision and field allowance paid to them. This supports the assertion of Bello (2022) that the program implementers saw it as an avenue to earn wealth quickly or have a bite of the 'National Cake' without necessarily considering its negative implications on the people and the goals of the program. Regarding other challenges of the program as the study revealed which include: Involvement of ghost workers, periodic change/instability in government, abandonment and discontinuity in government policies, very poor stipend paid to participants, poor monitoring, supervision and evaluation, truancy, un-seriousness and nonchalant attitude of the participants, among others, it is sad to note that despite efforts to re-orientate the civil lethargic and negative attitude of many civil servants it has not yielded the desired results as efforts to improve their accountability and productivity have also failed (Agbo, 2023). This is a fact in that as testified by one of the participants who was interviewed, he participated in the N-Teach program. He went further to state that he registered in the program as an NCE holder and while supposed to be participating in the program, he was running a fulltime degree programme in a university not even close to his place of primary assignment and was only visiting his place of assignment seldom when it is time sign the clearance papers for payment of stipend. Another participant interviewed also testified that he was already employed in a private firm somewhere outside Enugu state and still registered for the N-Power Health program. He stated that he did not visit his place of assignment up to ten times while the program lasted but was being covered by an N-Power official whom he had arranged with on how they would be sharing his stipend when paid. A female participant interviewed stated that just few months after being enlisted in the N-Power VAIDS volunteers' program, she got married and relocated to Abuja where her husband resides. She stated that luckily for her within that period, their N-Power liaison officer was changed and the new person that came did not know much about them, hence while she was living in Abuja, her younger sister was standing in for her when it was required of them to come for clearance or any physical appearance and she was still receiving her stipend with ease and sharing it with her placeholder. All these testified to the fact that the program was poorly implemented and marred by some irregularities on the part of the participants and the N-Power officials. This is why today

the civil service and its officials are being accused of multi-dimensional corruption; indolent attitude following from periodic changes in administration; and the resultant abandonment and discontinuity in government policies and programs such as the N-Power program. Thus, it was in line with this observation that Okike and Ngonadi (2017) remarked that the first step towards improving public policies implementation in Nigeria is by first tackling the hydra-headed monster of corruption, nonchalant attitude of Nigerians to initiated policies and policy discontinuity due to government transition before any other thing. This is to say that Nigeria has had social investment programs in the past and contemporary times but they suffered poor implementation and discontinuity emanating from periodic change in government and administration which can only be addressed if the present federal government can go back; reintroduce and reinvigorate them, at least beginning with the N-Power program Sanni, (2023).

Conclusion

An assessment of the implementation of the N-Power program in Enugu State sadly revealed mostly negative and unpleasant reports on the program. Overall, the program did not make significant contributions to the socio-economic development of the state through job creation and empowerment of the youth. To that effect, it could not substantially help in reducing youth unemployment and poverty in the state between 2015 and 2023. Though, through its various components, such as N-Power Teach, N-Power Agro, N-Power Health, and N-Power Creative, the program was intended to provide employment opportunities to a significant number of unemployed youths in the state, the program could not substantially improve their livelihood or enhance their skills and capacity through the training and empowerment initiatives due to the shortness of the duration and other major challenges that the program faced. Therefore, while the N-Power program has not made significantly the anticipated contributions in addressing youth unemployment and poverty and enhancing youth skills acquisition, there is still room for improvement. With necessary adjustments and commitment from all stakeholders, the program's potential to further drive socio-economic development by empowering the youth in Enugu State will be achieved.

Recommendations

In the light of the above conclusion, the following recommendations are made: The government before embarking on such program in future should:

1. Conduct targeted awareness campaigns to ensure that potential beneficiaries are well-informed about the program. This should include partnership with local media,

community leaders, and educational institutions and through the social media to reach a wide range of eligible candidates.

2. Develop a robust selection process that assesses applicants' qualifications, skills, and suitability for the program. This can include a combination of written tests, physical interviews, and practical assessments to identify the most deserving candidates.
3. Design training programs that are tailored to the specific needs and demands of the contemporary and future times and labour markets. It should consider collaborating with local educational institutions, experts and captains of industry, and relevant stakeholders to develop training curricula that align with the nation's economic sector needs and priorities.
4. Ensure a strategic deployment of program beneficiaries to areas where their skills and expertise are most needed within the country. To this end, collaboration with relevant government agencies, local private and public institutions and organizations, are needed to secure appropriate job placements for the beneficiaries.
5. Establish a robust monitoring and evaluation system to track the progress and impact of such program. There should be regular assessment of the effectiveness of such program so as to identify in time the challenges and make necessary adjustments to improve its outcome.
6. Provide post-program support to the beneficiaries of such program to enhance their transition into the workforce. It could include career counseling, entrepreneurship training, and networking opportunities to help them secure permanent employment or start their own business or trade.
7. Ensure that the duration of such program is such that should guarantee adequate time for learning of the required skills and in the various forms and capacities necessary. Those who might be slow in the learning process should be afforded opportunities for post-period (further) training so that they can adequately perfect the skills they are learning.
8. Ensure that adequate fund is made available for the implementation of such program. Also the beneficiaries should be given enough take-off grants that will be sufficient for the starting of the kind of skills they have learned. Equally, mechanisms should be put in place to track the funds disbursement to see that they are not embezzled or diverted but appropriately utilized. Those found to have misappropriated the fund should be adequately punished to deter others.

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