N-Power Programme and Poverty Reduction in Niger State, Nigeria

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Abstract

One of the greatest challenges facing Nigerian economy today is poverty. The menacing of social and economic problem of poverty in Nigeria like many developing countries past governments to introduced N-power programme aimed at reducing poverty in Nigeria particularly State. The study examines N-power Programme and poverty reduction in Niger State, Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive survey design with the population of 31,107 beneficiaries benefited from N-power programmes. To determine the sample size, Taro Yamane formula was adopted where the study arrived at 392. The study revealed that there exist negative perceptions among these beneficiaries regarding the programme's effectiveness in addressing these critical issues. The study further identifies several key factors affecting the implementation of N-Power programmes toward poverty alleviation in Niger State. These factors range from administrative challenges such as insufficient information and website/internet hiccups to more systemic issues like non-payment of stipends, bribery and corruption, and political interference. Given the identified challenge of inadequate funding as a hindrance to N-power's effectiveness, it is recommended that the government and relevant stakeholders increase the programme's funding allocation. This will ensure sustained program activities, expand outreach to more beneficiaries, and provide resources for comprehensive capacity-building initiatives beyond short-term employment.

Keywords: N-Power, Poverty, System, Economic Development, Niger.

Introduction

Globally, poverty remains prevalent despite international efforts such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) 2020 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 2030, aimed at reducing poverty to less than 3% by 2030 (World Bank, 2022). Poverty poses a significant challenge globally, as highlighted in a 2022 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report, which states that around 1.2 billion individuals (19.1%) in 111 countries live in severe

multidimensional poverty (referred to as "poverty" here). Among them, 593 million are children under 18 years old. Sub-Saharan Africa is home to the largest number of impoverished individuals (nearly 579 million), followed by South Asia (385 million) (Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, 2022). The World Bank stated that the earnings of the least affluent 40% of the global populace probably decreased by 4% in 2020. Consequently, the number of individuals in extreme poverty surged by 11% in 2020, rising from 648 million to 719 million. This rise elevated the extreme poverty rate by 1.2 percentage points higher than anticipated, as extreme poverty was predicted to decline. The majority of impoverished individuals reside in developing regions such as Africa, Asia, and Latin America. According to the World Bank Report (2023) for Africa, it is estimated that over 200 million people are enduring severe poverty. On average, 40 to 50% of Sub-Saharan Africans live below the international poverty threshold of one U.S. dollar per day (World Bank, 2023).

In West Africa, nearly all countries, including Nigeria, are categorized as either low-income economy by the World Bank or low human development countries by the UNDP (Jev, Henry, John, & Ieave, 2023). Regionally, efforts are also underway to combat poverty. The African Union, for example, introduced its Agenda 2063 in January 2015, aiming to promote a high standard of living and foster a prosperous, united, and sustainable African continent by 2063 (African Union, 2022). Since then, African leaders have taken additional steps to formulate national strategies that will help each country achieve these objectives, with a focus on poverty alleviation and overall development across the continent. Despite having the biggest economy and population in Africa, Nigeria presents limited prospects for most of its citizens. Nigerians born in 2020 are projected to be future workers with productivity levels 36% lower than they could achieve with full access to education and healthcare, ranking 7th lowest on the human capital index globally. The lack of robust job creation and entrepreneurial opportunities hinders the absorption of the 3.5 million Nigerians joining the workforce annually, leading many workers to migrate in search of better prospects (World Bank, 2024).

The poverty rate is estimated to have reached 38.9% in 2023, with around 87 million Nigerians living below the poverty line — making it the world's second-largest impoverished population after India. From 2000 to 2014, Nigeria's economy saw widespread and sustained growth

averaging over 7% annually, benefiting from favorable global conditions, macroeconomic policies, and initial-stage structural reforms (World Bank, 2024).. Between 2015 and 2022, growth rates saw a decline, and GDP per capita remained stagnant. This was influenced by distortions in monetary and exchange rate policies, rising fiscal deficits due to reduced oil production and an expensive fuel subsidy program, increased trade protectionism, and external shocks like the COVID-19 pandemic. These weakened economic foundations led to a 24-year high inflation rate of 31.7% in February 2024, contributing to a rise in poverty among millions of Nigerians due to sluggish growth (World Bank, 2024). Niger State, situated in Nigeria's central region, grapples with significant poverty-related challenges (Isah & Idris, 2023). The state's economy is primarily agrarian, with a substantial portion of its population involved in subsistence farming (Isah & Idris, 2023). Despite having potential in agriculture, factors like inadequate infrastructure, limited education levels, and restricted access to healthcare services have contributed to the ongoing poverty in the region (Abubakar, Danjuma, Ndanusa, Aliyu, Yisa, Utare, & Saidu, 2023). In response to youth unemployment and poverty, the Nigerian government introduced the Npower program (N-Power Guide, 2024). Npower is a social initiative aimed at equipping young Nigerians with skill development, job training, and temporary employment opportunities (N-Power Guide, 2024). The program comprises various components such as Npower Teach, Npower Agro, Npower Health, Npower Tech, and Npower Creative, each tailored to specific sectors and skill requirements. Participants in the program undergo training and receive stipends for a defined period, gaining valuable experience and skills to improve their employability (N-Power Guide, 2024). Despite the positive influence of the N-Power initiative in Niger State, it encountered difficulties in effectively tackling the widespread problem of poverty. Prior to the programme's implementation, poverty rates in the state were exceedingly elevated, with a notable portion of the populace facing challenges in meeting fundamental requirements. Data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in 2016 revealed that the poverty rate in Niger State stood at approximately 66.4% (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). This critical situation indicated restricted opportunities for education, healthcare, and employment, leading to an ongoing economic struggle for numerous households (Omidiji, 2023).

Following the initiation of the N-Power program, there were observable enhancements in employment figures and human capital development (Kayode, Niworu, Agaie & Alaba, 2023). Numerous young graduates secured job placements across diverse sectors, acquiring valuable skills and income streams (Muhammad, Mustapha, Hassan, & Suleiman, 2023). Nevertheless, despite these positive transformations, poverty rates in Niger State persisted at high levels. By 2020, the poverty rate had only marginally reduced to approximately 64.3%, as per NBS data (World Bank, 2023). This indicates that although the programme offered employment and training, it has not been adequate to significantly lessen poverty levels in the state in a short span. Even by 2022, poverty rates in Niger State were still concerning, with roughly 62.8% of the populace living below the poverty line (World Bank, 2023). The inability of the N-Power initiative to fully eliminate poverty can be ascribed to several factors, including the extensive scale of poverty, limited resources, and the complexity of socioeconomic issues (Kayode, et al., 2023). Numerous studies (Dauda, Adeyeye, Yakubu, Oni, Umar, 2019; Kayode, et al., 2023; Omidiji, 2023; Muhammad, et al., 2023) have evaluated the effectiveness of various poverty alleviation programs by the Nigerian government, examining their challenges and potential benefits. Most of these studies scrutinized their content, structure, and execution to assess their appropriateness for poverty reduction. However, there is still a gap in understanding the experiences of beneficiaries in terms of how these programmes have led to sustainable improvements in their living standards, particularly in Niger State. This study interrogates N-power Programme and poverty reduction in Niger State, Nigeria. The main objective of this study is to examine the N-power Programme and poverty reduction in Niger State, Nigeria. However, the specific objectives of the Study therefore, are: To investigate the perceptions and experiences of N-power beneficiaries in Niger State regarding the programme's effectiveness in reducing poverty and improving their standard of living. To explore the challenges encountered by N-power beneficiaries in Niger State and their implications for poverty alleviation.

Conceptual Elucidation

N-Power

The N-Power Program is part of the National Social Investment Programme (NSIP), a collection of programs established in 2015 and introduced in 2016 by the Nigerian Federal Government. Its

purpose is to offer socio-economic assistance to disadvantaged individuals throughout Nigeria. Arowubusoye (2020) argues that Nigeria's federal government developed the N-Power program to significantly decrease youth unemployment rates. The main goal is to equip young graduates and non-graduates with the necessary skills, tools, and resources to transition from unemployment to employment, entrepreneurship, and innovation. As stated by Afolabi (2021), N-Power is a job creation and empowerment initiative within the National Social Investment Programme led by Muhammadu Buhari's civilian administration. The programme targets young Nigerians aged 18 to 35. N-Power has four main objectives: To directly enhance the well-being of a significant number of unemployed young Nigerians. The N-Programme is categorized into two parts: the Graduate Category (N-Power Volunteer Corps) and the Non-Graduate Category (N-Power Knowledge and N-Power Build). The N-Power Volunteer Corps is a post-college engagement initiative for Nigerians aged 18 to 35. It's a two-year paid volunteering program. Participants carry out their main duties in designated public services in their local communities. All N-Power Volunteers receive computing devices with essential information related to their roles, as well as materials for ongoing training and development. The programme focuses on four key areas of youth empowerment: N-Power Teaching, N-Power Agriculture, N-Power Health, and N-Power Taxation (NPower Information Guide 2022).

Poverty

Poverty, much like many other terms, lacks a singular universal definition, making it a complex and elusive concept. It is widely acknowledged as a global issue. According to the Central Bank of Nigeria (2018) cited in Alfa, Otaida, and Audu (2022), poverty refers to a condition where an individual cannot adequately provide for their basic necessities such as food, clothing, and shelter. This condition also includes an inability to meet social and economic responsibilities, a lack of gainful employment, skills, assets, and self-worth, and limited access to essential social and economic services like education, healthcare, clean water, and sanitation. Consequently, individuals experiencing poverty have limited opportunities to improve their well-being to their full potential. Kankwanda in Barnes (2023) views poverty as a multidimensional issue influenced by various factors, including a lack of access to income-generating activities and essential amenities. Taiwo and Agwu, 2019; Nkwede, 2014) define poverty as the inability of

individuals to attain a minimum standard of living and gain respect and recognition in society. This lack can lead individuals to resort to desperate measures to support their families. Based on these definitions, poverty can be understood as the inability to meet life's basic needs, which can contribute to increased criminal activity. A closer examination reveals that individuals engaged in serious crimes often lack employment or skills to sustain themselves and their families, either due to poor health or old age. It is evident that poverty and unemployment can lead to social problems by heightening social tensions that weaken the societal fabric. Lately, there has been a considerable focus among researchers on poverty reduction strategies and their execution in Nigeria.

The concept of poverty reduction has therefore become very important and attracted the attention of both international and national scholars over the years, leading to different definitions. For example, Alfa, et al. (2022) defines poverty reduction in the broadest sense as increasing income, consumption, and human development. This means that, poverty reduction implies an improvement in the standard of living of people through increased income, increased expenditure, increased consumption, access to health and education. Taiwo and Agu, (2019) define poverty reduction as a physical decrease in the incidence of poverty in number and size. According to him, poverty can be reduced through provision of empowerment opportunities and capacity building in a favourable environment. In a similar way, Kayode, et al. (2023) conceives poverty reduction, or poverty alleviation to mean a combination of largely economic or humanitarian measures, which are intended to lift people permanently out of poverty (Slikkerveer, 2019). The aim of poverty reduction is to raise the standard of living of people living in a condition regarded as undesirable to a condition considered desirable. Within the context of this study poverty reduction is operationalised to mean the process of alleviating people or community from condition that keep them in perpetual lack and penury or a state of improving the financial means required for a basic quality of life of a people or a community.

Numerous studies have delved into this topic, and some of them are discussed below: Dauda, Adeyeye, Yakubu, Oni, and Umar (2019) investigated the impact of N-Power initiatives on youth empowerment in Minna Metropolis, Niger State. The study gathered data using a cross-sectional survey design, sampling 225 respondent youths from a total of 512 N-Power

beneficiaries in the metropolis. A structured questionnaire was employed to collect responses from the participants. Descriptive statistics like mean and percentages were utilized to analyze demographic data, while inferential statistics such as Pearson product-moment correlation were applied to evaluate the hypothesis. The study's findings revealed no significant correlation between the N-Power program and employment generation, poverty alleviation, and skill acquisition. It also identified job insecurity, delayed stipend payments, bribery, corruption, and inadequate monitoring as major obstacles undermining the effectiveness of the N-Power initiative. The study recommends expanding the program's scope to include more unemployed graduates, transforming it into tenure opportunities for beneficiaries, and providing grants to entrepreneurial graduates to effectively utilise their skills.

Joseph and Isokpan (2021) conducted a study on the perception of the N-Power program's impact on poverty eradication in Ovia North-East Local Government Area, Edo State. The study involved a sample size of one hundred (100) respondents selected from the area. Data analysis was carried out using the simple percentage method, and the Chi-square statistical analytical method was applied to test the hypothesis. The findings indicated that N-Power programs have contributed to youth empowerment in Ovia North-East LGA of Edo State but have not significantly impacted poverty alleviation in the same area. As a result, the study recommended several measures. Firstly, economic policies should prioritize job creation. Secondly, there is a need for a unified poverty reduction agenda involving all stakeholders, including the Federal Government, State Government, Local Governments, NGOs, and the International Donor Community. Thirdly, integration of apprenticeship into the formal school system was proposed to equip students/trainees with basic skills in their chosen vocations before leaving secondary school. Fourthly, strengthening the capability of unemployed rural and urban dwellers through government encouragement was highlighted, especially since they form a significant portion of the population. Fifthly, increasing opportunities for empowerment for both urban and rural unemployed individuals in productive work was emphasized. Finally, promoting rural development through N-Power programs was suggested, as integrated rural development is crucial for alleviating poverty among the rural population, which constitutes a significant portion of the total population. Bison (2022) conducted a study on assessing the impact of the N-Power

Scheme in the Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State. The study aimed to investigate the effects of the N-Power scheme on employment generation, the economic well-being of beneficiaries, and the enhancement of job skills among beneficiaries in the Cross River South Senatorial District. The study utilized a survey design as the research approach, employing purposive sampling to select a sample from the study population. A sample size of two hundred and fifty (250) respondents was chosen for the study. The study's hypotheses were tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation, and the analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). The study's findings revealed a positive and significant relationship between the N-Power scheme and economic well-being, job skill enhancement, and employment generation. Based on these results, the study recommended that the government implement mandatory training and workshops in areas such as Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and agriculture for volunteers. This measure aims to enhance their employability once their participation in the scheme concludes. Mohammed, Mustapha, Hassan, and Suleiman (2023) conducted a study to investigate the impact of N-Power programmes on poverty reduction in Niger State. The study utilized a descriptive survey design, focusing on a population of 1612 beneficiaries who had benefited from N-Power programs. The sample size was determined using the Taro Yamane formula, resulting in a sample of 377. The study findings indicate that N-Power programs have contributed to socio-economic development, specifically through N-Teach, N-Health, N-Agro, and N-Vaids programmes, leading to a reduction in poverty in Niger State. The study also highlights outcomes such as skills development, increased income for beneficiaries, employment generation, and improved food availability, among others. However, the study recommends evaluating N-Power programs such as N-Teach, N-Health, N-Agro, and N-Vaids before implementation, among other suggestions. Kayode, Agaie, Niworu, and Alaba (2023) conducted an investigation into the effectiveness of the N-Power programme, which focuses on youth empowerment and poverty reduction among beneficiaries in Bida Local Government Area of Niger State, Nigeria. The study utilised the human capital theory as its theoretical framework. Data were collected through both qualitative and quantitative methods, with 320 questionnaires distributed among a population of 1598 individuals. Of the distributed instruments, only 285 were returned and used for analysis. The study employed purposive

sampling to select samples from the study area, and data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The study findings indicate that a significant number of disengaged N-Power beneficiaries expressed that the program did not contribute to reducing poverty in their lives. Consequently, poverty and unemployment remain prevalent, as many N-Power beneficiaries lacked adequate financial remuneration and essential skills to enhance their capacity. The study recommends that future poverty reduction programs should offer fair remuneration that aligns with the prevailing cost of living. Furthermore, the study suggests that State and Local governments should establish sustainable anti-poverty schemes similar to the N-Power program in their respective states and local government areas, complementing the Federal Government's anti-poverty initiatives.

Theoretical Framework

The study utilised David Easton's 1965 system theory from his book "World Politics Volume ix" as the theoretical foundation. This framework views an organisation or society as a dynamic open system comprising elements that interact to maintain a relatively stable equilibrium through constant energy and information exchanges with the environment. According to systems theory, social organizations are complex entities with interconnected elements. These systems consist of inputs, processes, outputs, feedback mechanisms, and interactions with the surrounding environment, creating a dynamic and interconnected structure. Applying this theory to the study, it perceives the government as a system where input originates from the populace in the form of requests for empowerment programmes to reduce poverty and improve income levels, along with initiatives implemented by the government to benefit the beneficiaries as a whole. The government, particularly the N-Power programme, functions as the processing unit that receives input in the form of demands from the public regarding poverty reduction programs, processes these demands, and generates outputs, namely the N-Power scheme designed to alleviate poverty among young people. This theory illustrates how the government responds to the needs of the population by providing essential life necessities. It emphasizes the presentation of demands by the public to the government, the government's actions regarding these demands, and the resulting programme aimed at reducing poverty and enhancing the well-being of the population.

Methodology

The methodology employed a descriptive survey research design, encompassing the entire population of N-Power beneficiaries in Niger State. However, out of the total 31,107 unemployed individuals who have benefited from N-Power programmes, this study specifically covered 31,107 participants in the N-Teach Programme, 2,892 in the N-Health programme, 5,187 in the N-Agro programme, 3,119 in the N-Tax programme, 2,615 in the N-Build programme, and 2,918 in the N-Tech programme. The sample size for the study was determined statistically using the Taro Yamane formula (1973), which is expressed as:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N\,(e)^2}$$

n = Sample size

N=Population size

e=Level of significance at (0.05)

N=31,107

(e)= 0.05

$$n = \frac{31{,}107}{1 + 31{,}107\,(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{31{,}107}{31{,}107 \times 0.0025}$$

$$n = \frac{31{,}107}{77.7675}$$

$$n = 400$$

Based on the above calculation, the sample size for the study will be 400

Stratified sampling techniques were implemented to ensure equal representation of beneficiaries across all N-Power programmes based on their respective populations. Additionally, the researcher utilised this method to determine the number of respondents from each of the three zones within Niger State. Within each zone, simple random techniques were applied to select two local governments. The selected local governments were as follows: Kontagora and Mariga from Niger North, Suleja and Chanchaga from Niger East, and Bida and Lapai from Niger South.

A structured questionnaire, incorporating a Four-point Likert scale, was employed to gather information from the targeted respondents. Data analysis was conducted based on the questionnaire responses, utilising frequency distribution tables and simple percentages.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Four hundred (400) copies of the questionnaires were printed and distributed to the respondents out of which three hundred and ninety two (392) were duly filled and returned with the helped of a research assistant. The Analysis carried out was based on the questionnaire filled and returned representing ninety-eight percent, (98%). Eight (8) copies of the questionnaires were not returned and this represents two (2%) percent.

Table 1 Sex Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	%age
Male	267	68.1
Females	125	31.9
Total	**392**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Table 1 presents the sex distribution of respondents in a study focusing on N-power and poverty reduction programs in Niger State. The data reveals that the majority of respondents were male, constituting 68.1% of the total sample, while females accounted for 31.9%. This stark difference in gender representation within the study participants raises important questions about gender equity and access to such programmes. The findings imply a potential gender disparity in the participation or accessibility of individuals, especially women, to initiatives like N-power and other poverty reduction programmes in Niger State. This suggests a need for policy interventions and program adjustments to ensure equal opportunities and inclusivity across genders. Addressing this gender gap is crucial for promoting fairness, social justice, and effective outcomes in poverty alleviation efforts.

Table 2 Age Distribution of Respondents

Age	Frequency	%age
18-25	41	10.5
26-33	144	36.7
34-41	182	46.4
Above 41 years	25	6.4
Total	**392**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

The result presented in Table 2 shows that the largest group falls within the 34-41 years category, comprising 46.4% of the total sample. Following this, the 26-33 years age group represents 36.7% of respondents, while the 18-25 years group accounts for 10.5%. The smallest proportion of respondents, at 6.4%, is from the above 41 years category. These findings suggest that individuals in the middle-age brackets, specifically those between 26-41 years, are more represented in the study compared to younger or older age groups. This demographic skew could have implications for programme design and targeting within N-power and poverty reduction initiatives in Niger State.

Table 3 Educational Attainment of Respondents

Education	Frequency	%age
No formal education	21	5.4
Primary	97	24.8
Secondary	40	10.2
Tertiary	234	59.6
Total	**392**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Table 3 shows majority of respondents, accounting for 59.6% of the total sample, have tertiary education. This suggests that a significant portion of the participants in the study possess higher

levels of formal education, potentially indicating a more skilled and knowledgeable pool of individuals engaging with N-power and poverty reduction initiatives in Niger State. Following tertiary education, the next most represented educational category is primary education, comprising 24.8% of respondents. Secondary education and no formal education have lower representations at 10.2% and 5.4%, respectively. These findings have several implications. Firstly, the high percentage of respondents with tertiary education underscores the importance of higher education in accessing and engaging with programmes like N-power, which often require specific skills and qualifications. This highlights the role of education in enhancing opportunities for economic empowerment and poverty reduction. However, the lower representation of respondents with primary, secondary, or no formal education raises questions about inclusivity and accessibility.

Table 4 Location of Respondents

Location	Frequency	%age
Rural	116	29.6
Semi-Rural	83	21.2
Urban	103	26.3
Semi-Urban	90	22.9
Total	**392**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Table 4 presents the distribution of respondents based on location (rural, semi-rural, urban, and semi-urban) in the study focusing on N-power and poverty reduction programs in Niger State. The data shows that the highest percentage of respondents, 29.6%, come from rural areas; following this, semi-rural areas contribute 21.2% of the sample, while urban and semi-urban areas account for 26.3% and 22.9%, respectively. These findings highlight the diverse geographical representation of participants engaging with poverty reduction and empowerment programs in Niger State. Each location category likely presents unique challenges, opportunities, and development contexts that should be considered in programme planning and implementation.

Table 5 The perceptions of N-power beneficiaries in Niger State regarding the programme's effectiveness in reducing poverty

Variables	SA Freq. (%)	A Freq. (%)	D Freq. (%)	SD Freq. (%)	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	Remark
The N-Power programme has reduced the level of youth unemployment in Niger State	14(56) (3.6%)	43(129) (11%)	189(378) (48.2%)	146(146) (37.2%)	1.8	Rejected
N-power programme can only be beneficiary to the youths in the short run, but not in the long run	232(928) (59.2%)	101(303) (25.8%)	30(60) (7.7%)	29(29) (7.3%)	3.4	Accepted
The N30,000, paid to the N-Power beneficiaries monthly is capable of taking the beneficiaries out of borderline poverty	77(308) (19.6%)	46(138) (11.7%)	201(402) (51.3%)	68(68) (17.4%)	2.3	Rejected
The stipend paid to empowered youths correlates to a substantial upliftment of the youth out of relative poverty	249(996) (63.5%)	115(345) (29.4%)	13(26) (3.3%)	15(15) (3.8)	3.5	Accepted
The programme has not improved upon the beneficiaries' lives in Niger State	268(1,072) (68.4%)	105(315) (26.8%)	16(32) (4.1%)	3(3) (0.7%)	3.6	Accepted
Average Overall Mean					**2.9**	

Source: Field survey 2024. The theoretical mean for accepting the mean is 3.0 remark and above.

Table 5 table presents statistical data and perceptions of N-power beneficiaries in Niger State regarding the programme's impact on youth unemployment and poverty reduction. The variables include responses ranging from Strongly Agree (SA) to Strongly Disagree (SD), with

corresponding frequencies and percentages. The mean values and remarks indicate the overall sentiment towards each statement. The first statement regarding the reduction of youth unemployment through the N-Power programme shows mixed perceptions. While 56% strongly agree, indicating a positive view, a significant portion (48.2%) strongly disagrees, suggesting skepticism or dissatisfaction. This dichotomy leads to a mean value of 1.8, indicating a rejection of the statement. This finding is crucial as it reflects differing opinions among beneficiaries regarding the program's effectiveness in addressing unemployment.

Moving on to the statement about the program's short-term benefits for youth, the majority (59.2%) strongly agree, with a mean value of 3.4, indicating acceptance of this perception. This suggests that many beneficiaries view N-Power as beneficial in the short run, aligning with the program's initial objectives of providing temporary employment and skill development opportunities. Regarding the adequacy of the monthly stipend (N30,000) in alleviating poverty, the responses are divided. While 51.3% strongly disagree, indicating dissatisfaction with the stipend's impact on poverty, 19.6% strongly agree, suggesting a positive view. The mean value of 2.3 leans towards rejection, indicating a prevailing sentiment that the stipend alone is insufficient to lift beneficiaries out of borderline poverty. The statement concerning substantial upliftment of youth out of relative poverty through the programme shows more positive perceptions. A significant majority (63.5%) strongly agree, with a mean value of 3.5, indicating acceptance of this perception. This suggests that many beneficiaries perceive the programme as contributing substantially to poverty alleviation, aligning with its broader objectives.

Table 6 Challenges Facing the Effective Implementation of N-Power Programme in Niger State

Variable	SA Freq.	A Freq.	D Freq.	SD Freq. (%)	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	Remark

	(%)	(%)	(%)			
Lack of adequate funding is one of the challenges confronting the implementation of the N-Power programme	238(952) (43.1%)	131(393) (36%)	21(42) (8.8%)	2(2) (9.6%)	3.6	Accepted
There is a lack of transparency and accountability in the implementation and management of the N-Power programme	193(772) (49.2%)	101(303) (25.8%)	30(60) (7.7%)	68(68) (17.3%)	3.1	Accepted
The N-Power programme has been bedeviled with corrupt practices.	209(836) (53.3%)	146(438) (37.3%)	20(40) (5.1%)	17(17) (4.3%)	3.4	Accepted
There are overbearing hands of politicians in the programme	217(868) (55.4%)	115(345) (29.3%)	13(26) (3.3%)	47(47) (12)	3.3	Accepted
The N-Power programme is confronted with delayed payment of stipends to the beneficiaries	235(940) (60%)	138(414) (35.2%)	16(32) (4.1%)	3(3) (0.7%)	3.6	Accepted
Average Overall Mean					**3.4**	

Source: Field survey 2024. The theoretical mean for accepting the mean is 3.0 remark and above.

Table 6 outlines the challenges facing the implementation of the N-power programme in Niger State, as perceived by respondents. The variables include responses ranging from Strongly Agree (SA) to Strongly Disagree (SD), with corresponding frequencies, percentages, mean values, and remarks indicating the overall sentiment towards each challenge. The first challenge highlighted is the lack of adequate funding, with 43.1% strongly agreeing and 36% agreeing. This indicates a widespread perception among respondents that insufficient funding is a significant obstacle to the program's success, as reflected in the high mean value of 3.6, which leans towards acceptance of this challenge. Similarly, the lack of transparency and accountability in programme

implementation and management is seen as a significant concern, with 49.2% strongly agreeing and 25.8% agreeing. The mean value of 3.1, leaning towards acceptance, indicates a prevailing sentiment among respondents regarding this challenge. Corruption within the N-power programme is another prominent challenge, with 53.3% strongly agreeing and 37.3% agreeing. This high level of agreement, along with a mean value of 3.4, suggests a widespread perception of corruption as a significant issue affecting the programme's effectiveness. Respondents also perceive political interference as a challenge, with 55.4% strongly agreeing and 29.3% agreeing. The mean value of 3.3 leans towards acceptance, indicating a prevailing sentiment regarding political influence affecting the programme's operations. Lastly, delayed payment of stipends to beneficiaries is identified as a challenge, with 60% strongly agreeing and 35.2% agreeing. The high agreement levels and a mean value of 3.6, leaning towards acceptance, highlight the widespread perception of payment delays as a significant issue within the programme. The average overall mean value of 3.4 indicates a general acceptance of these challenges, reflecting a consensus among respondents regarding the critical issues facing N-power implementation in Niger State.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study shed light on the perceptions of N-power beneficiaries in Niger State regarding the programme's impact on youth unemployment and poverty reduction. It is revealed that there exists a negative perception among these beneficiaries regarding the programme's effectiveness in addressing these critical issues. This insight is significant as it reflects the lived experiences and perspectives of individuals directly impacted by the N-power programme, highlighting areas of concern and potential areas for improvement. This aligns with similar observations made by Paulinus and Aghaedo (2020), who also found NAPEP to be ineffective in poverty reduction, suggesting a broader pattern of skepticism towards government-led poverty alleviation initiatives. Moreover, the contrasting findings from Joseph and Isokpan's (2021) study in Ovia North-East LGA of Edo State, where N-power programmes were seen to impact youth empowerment positively but not poverty alleviation, highlight the nuanced and varied outcomes of such programmes across different regions.

Moreover, the study identifies several key factors affecting the implementation of N-Power programmes toward poverty alleviation in Niger State. These factors range from administrative challenges such as insufficient information and website/internet hiccups to more systemic issues like non-payment of stipends, bribery and corruption, and political interference. The mention of high transportation costs borne by participants to work also highlights the economic challenges faced by beneficiaries, which can impede the programme's intended poverty reduction outcomes. These findings resonate with an earlier study by Akujuru and Enyioko (2019), which also identified similar challenges affecting the implementation of N-Power programmes. These challenges included insufficient information dissemination, delayed stipend payments, instances of bribery and corruption, issues with bank verification numbers (BVN), and undue political influence in programme operations. This alignment underscores the persistent nature of these implementation challenges and their widespread impact across different regions and studies. The administrative challenges highlighted, such as insufficient information and website/internet hiccups, point to areas where improvements in communication strategies and technological infrastructure could enhance programme efficiency and transparency.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the robust analysis and findings presented, several key conclusions can be drawn regarding the impact of the N-power program on poverty reduction in Niger State. These conclusions encapsulate the nuanced perspectives, challenges, and opportunities uncovered through the study's comprehensive research approach. Firstly, it is evident from the findings that N-power has had a tangible positive impact on poverty reduction in Niger State, particularly in terms of providing short-term benefits, skill development opportunities, and empowerment to beneficiaries. The programme has been instrumental in addressing youth unemployment and enhancing livelihood prospects for many participants. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that these benefits are often perceived as temporary, with concerns raised about the sustainability and long-term impact of the program on poverty alleviation. The study recommends the following:

i.   Given the identified challenge of inadequate funding as a hindrance to N-power's effectiveness, it is recommended that the government and relevant stakeholders increase the programme's funding allocation. This will ensure sustained program activities,

expand outreach to more beneficiaries, and provide resources for comprehensive capacity-building initiatives beyond short-term employment.

ii.   Building trust and confidence among beneficiaries and stakeholders is crucial for programme sustainability. Therefore, enhancing transparency and accountability mechanisms within N-power, such as regular financial audits, performance assessments, and public reporting, will promote transparency, reduce corruption risks, and demonstrate responsible stewardship of resources.

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