

## Impact Assessment of the National Social Investment Programme (NSIP) in Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

*The National Social Investment Programme (NSIP) was created in 2015 to alleviate poverty and improve the economic wellbeing of Nigerians. This study assesses the performance of the policy in Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria. The study employed Key Informant Interview (KII) and obtained data from 10 purposively selected stakeholders of the programme in Makurdi to elicit data to answer the research questions. Evidence from the study indicated that only three of the programmes: N-power, National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme and Conditional Cash Transfer Scheme are currently operational in the Makurdi. Evidence from the study indicates that the scheme has impacted the lives and improved the livelihoods of beneficiaries. Although the study shows that the programme has performed well as opined by stakeholders, evidence indicates that the scheme also encountered challenges which includes paucity of funds, material and personnel, lack of proper planning, delayed payment, corruption, and communication gaps. The study recommends that proper planning, adequate budgetary provisions, expansion of the scheme to other classes in the schools covered, timely payment of staff employed by scheme, improvement in the recruitment process should be put in place to improve the performance of the programme.*

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## 1. Introduction

Governments exist to solve public and social problems to continually improve the quality of life for citizens. Government responds to these problems through public policy. Public policies are the heart, soul, and identity of government everywhere. Public policies are actions taken by the government to respond to social problems. Poverty and unemployment remain one of the biggest social problems in Nigeria today. National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in its 2019 “Poverty and Inequality in Nigeria” report, highlights that 40 percent of the total population, or almost 83 million people, live below the country’s poverty line of 137,430 naira (\$381.75) per year. This made it imperative for the Nigerian government to put in place policies and programmes that will help improve the livelihood and socio-economic wellbeing of the excluded and vulnerable groups in their country.

To address the problem of poverty and unemployment in Nigeria, successive governments have implemented a range of programmes which include the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) in 2001, the Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P) in 2012, and currently the National Social Investment Programme (NSIP), which commenced in 2015.

Social Investment Policies refer to policies and interventions that aim to build the productive capacities of citizens. (Deeming and Smyth, 2015). According to the European Commission (2013) social investment policies reinforce social policies that protect and stabilize by addressing some of the causes of disadvantage and giving people tools with which to improve their social situations. The NSIP scheme created by the Administration of President Muhammadu Buhari was designed to enable citizens’ exit from the twin evils of poverty and unemployment through capacity building, investment, and direct financial support. The programme consists of four major components include the Job Creation and Youth Empowerment (N- Power), National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP), National Cash Transfer Programme (NCTP) and Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP). NSIP is generally aimed at increasing the income and improving livelihood of the poor and vulnerable households by providing access to targeted funds, thereby improving household ability to absorb economic shocks.

A study by (Abin, 2018) examined the impact of N-Power Programme on socio-economic lives of beneficiaries in Akwanga Metropolis of Nasarawa State. The study found that the programme improved the socio-economic lives of the beneficiaries by contributing immensely to their financial, material, and social well-being. In addition, the study also indicated overwhelming satisfaction with the programme among the beneficiaries. Abin (2018) study corroborates with the findings of Bisong (2019) assess the impact of the N-power scheme in the Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State also found that there exists a significant positive relationship between the scheme and the economic well-being of the beneficiaries.

Ifatimehin et al (2020) also conducted a study on the effects of N-Power scheme on youth empowerment in Ayingba, Dekina Local Government area of Kogi State. They found that the N-Power scheme has a positive effect on empowering the youths in Ayingba in different areas. Idoko and Udentia (2023) study on the effect of the National Social Investment Programme on the Human Capital Development in Enugu State and found that Home-Grown School Feeding Programme contributed to the economic empowerment of the State. Furthermore, Saleh, M.A (2019) studied the effect of the N-Power on the standard of living of business education graduates in Kano State, Nigeria and found that the scheme improved the standard of living of business education graduates in the State.

Although evidence indicates that the Social Investment programmes positively impacted the lives of beneficiaries in Nasarawa, Cross River, Enugu, Kogi and Kano States literature is scarce on the assessment of its performance of the in Benue State which is a gap that this study intends to fill.

This study assesses the contributions and challenges of social investment programmes for their beneficiaries in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria.

The objectives are to

- i. Identify the National Social Investment Programmes being implemented in Makurdi.
- ii. Identify the contributions of the programmes to improving the livelihood of beneficiaries in Makurdi.
- iii. Know what stakeholders think about the performance of the in Makurdi and
- iv. Identify challenges associated with the implementation and sustainability of the Programmes in the state.

To achieve the objectives the researcher asked the following questions to guide the study

- i. What are the National Social Investment Programmes being implemented in Makurdi?
- ii. What are the contributions of the National Social Investment Programme to the livelihood of beneficiaries in Makurdi?
- iii. What do stakeholders think about the performance of the programme in Makurdi?
- iv. What are the challenges encountered in the implementation of the programme in Makurdi?

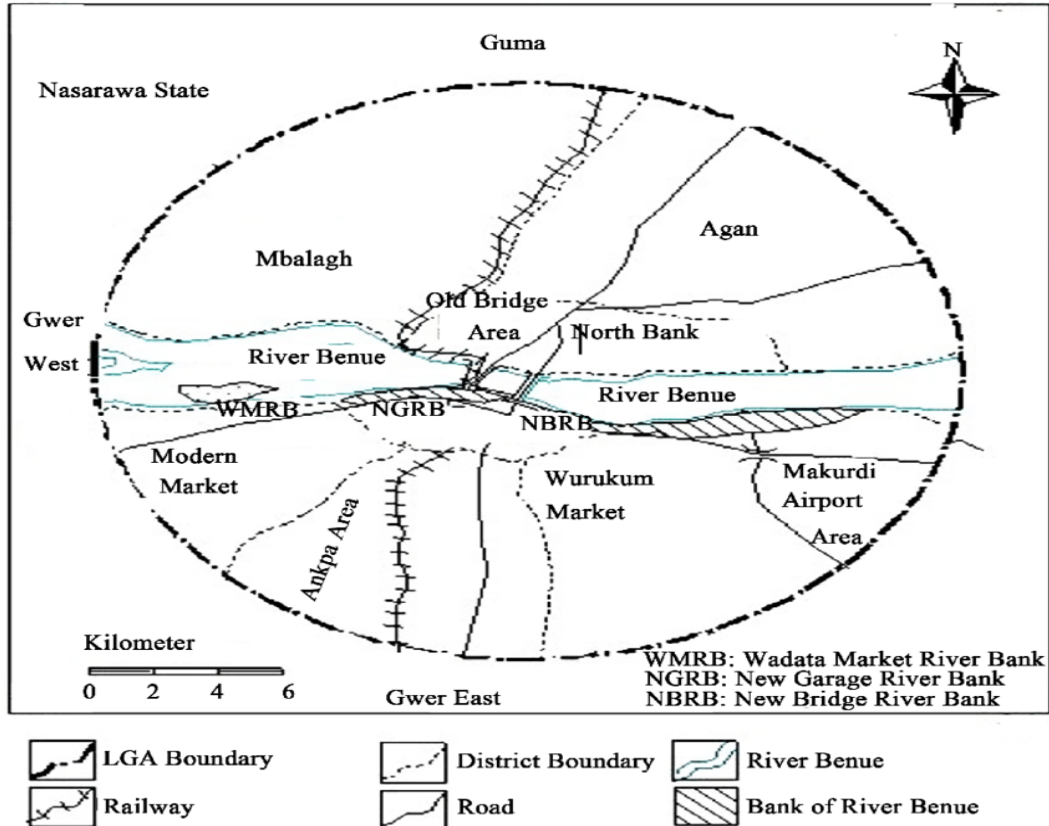
## **2. Methodology**

The descriptive research design is adopted for the study. This is because it helps to describe a phenomenon, population, and situation. It is more concerned with the what, when where and how questions rather than the why questions (McCombes, 2023). In addition, according to (McCombes, 2023) the research design could also be employed when little is known about a topic of a problem.

## **3. Study Area**

Makurdi, the capital of Benue State, lies the south bank of the Benue River founded at about 1927 when the railroad from Port Harcourt (279 miles [449 km] south south) was extended to Jos and Kaduna, Makurdi rapidly developed into a transportation and market centre. In 1976, following the division of Benue-Plateau state into two states, Makurdi was selected the capital of Benue State. The 0.5-mile- (0.8-km-) long combined rail and Road Bridge(1932) across the Benue River consolidated the town's position as a major transit point; Makurdi is located on the main highway network and has an airport. It is now a major trans-shipment point for cattle from northern Nigeria. From June to November every year, when the Niger River has high water, Makurdi serves as a port from which goods, including locally grown sesame seeds and cotton, are shipped to Lokoja (126 miles [203 km] west at the Niger-Benue confluence) and to the Niger River delta ports. The town is a local trade centre for yam, sorghum, millet, rice, cassava, shea nuts, sesame oil, peanuts (groundnuts), soybeans, and cotton raised by Tiv, Idoma, and Iggede people of the surrounding area. The major ethnic groups are the Tiv, Idoma, Iggede, Jukun, Agatu, Etulo, Alago, Igbo. Makurdi is home to Benue State University; University of Agriculture, Makurdi; Nigeria Army School of Military Engineering, Makurdi; and Akawe Torkula Polytechnic, ATP, Makurdi.

Figure 1: Map of Makurdi.



Reprinted from Terver S., Ejemi E., & Jonathan U (2017). Map of Benue Assessment of Radionuclide Content of Shore Sediments Collected from the Bank of River Benue, North-Central Nigeria. *Journal of Geoscience and Environment Protection*, 5, 57-65. <https://doi.org/10.4236/gep.2017.512004>

### 3.1 Population of the Study

The study population consists of beneficiaries of the National Social Investment Programmes in Makurdi local government, Benue State. This includes all males and females from 18 to 35 years who are beneficiaries of N-Power, head teachers, teachers, and cooks who work in public primary schools that benefitted from the project, as well as traders or men and women who are beneficiaries of the cash transfer policy. However, the general criteria for selecting participants in the study are accessibility, availability of the participants and most importantly, those who gave their consent to participate.

### 3.2 Sampling Technique

A combination of purposively and snowball sampling was employed in the selection of 10 respondents who are stakeholders from the Poverty Alleviation Department/Unit in Makurdi Local Government Area, head teachers, teachers, cooks who works in the schools that benefitted from the scheme. Generally, in a qualitative study, there is no technique or method to arrive at a sample size. However, the sample size chosen should be enough to sufficiently describe the phenomenon of interest and address the research question at hand.

### 3.3 Method of Data Collection and Analysis

Data for the study was gathered using Key Informant Interviews (KII). The method was

chosen for assuring effective participation of the research subjects and also for flexibility in the data collection that gave room for probing of respondents and participants because of the descriptive nature of the study. A phone was used to record the interview with the consent of the interviewee. The KIIs were transcribed and analysed using content analysis.

#### **4. Results and Discussion**

This section focuses on the presentation, analysis, and discussion of results. The demographic data shows that 60% (6) of the participants of the study were males while 40% (4) were females. In addition, the participants are traders, civil servants, head teachers and teachers.

##### **Research Question 1: What are the National Social Investment Programmes (NSIP) implemented in Markurdi?**

Concerning the existence of NSIP in Makurdi, participants of the study indicated that three of the NSIP programme existed in Benue State but only two of the programmes is currently operational in Makurdi as stated by one of the interviewees appointed to oversee the implementation of the program:

*“There are three operative National Social Investment Schemes in Benue State namely, N-power, National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme and Conditional Cash Transfer Scheme. However, in Makurdi, which is the state capital, we have just two of the schemes operational, which are the N- Power and Home-Grown School Feeding Programme. The conditional cash transfer is only but operative in 9 Local Government Areas of the State and they cover three senatorial district which is done by the Poverty Mapping Unit to access the most vulnerable” (KII/52years/Male/Married/Civil Servant/Christian/Focal Person).*

##### **Research Question 2: What are the contributions of the National Social Investment Programme to the livelihood of beneficiaries in Makurdi?**

Stakeholders agree that the programme made positive impact in the lives of the beneficiaries, including the vendors and pupils in a school that the scheme is being implemented in Markurdi as stated by the manager of the Home-Grown School Feeding programme who affirmed that

*“Yes, I will say, that the programme has had a lot of positive impact in the lives of beneficiaries from our own assessment. Reports gotten from head teachers who serve as monitors of this scheme in schools, and from our own onsite investigations and interactions with vendors and pupils as well as local farmers shows that, the programme has impacted and impacting positively in the quality of life of beneficiaries.”*

- (KII/56years/Male/Married/Civil Servant/Christian/Manager HGSFP).

Similarly, this was also further stressed by the manager of the N-Power unit who mentioned that

*“The scheme I will say, has been a successful one as its target is to empower the youth. Thus, it has engaged youths for a year. However, the first and second batch of beneficiaries (A & B) volunteered for 4/2 years. In terms of livelihood and quality of life of beneficiaries, I will say it has had positive impact to a large extent while others have not done so much after benefiting due to priority placement in that, one can only decide on how he or she wants to plan and execute goals even if resources are made available”.*

- (KII/49years/Male/Married/Civil Servant/Christian/Manager N-Power Unit)

This study corroborates with the findings of Idoko and Udenta (2023) who also found that the NSIP contributed to the economic development of the people of Enugu State.

In addition to the fact that the programme provided job opportunity for the youth, evidence also shows that the children majority of who are poor, are also very happy to go to school when they know they will be fed as narrated by a head teacher in one of the schools the program was implemented:

*“I will say that there have been a lot of positive changes on the beneficiaries including vendors and pupils. I have interacted with the vendors and there are quite impressive responses that come from them, testifying to the fact that this programme has been of immense benefit to them. The children that are fed, always seem very happy and enthusiastic about coming to school punctually, this is because, the children are told that if they do not come to school early, nor participate actively in school, the food will no longer be given to them. Most of them fear to lose this privilege and try to avoid”*

(KII/49years/Female/Married/Teacher/Christian/Head Teacher).

Similarly, another head teacher also mentioned that:

*“There are children who usually come to school without taking any meal from home which affects their productivity. Since the inception of this programme, there has been a lot of improvement”*

(KII/50years/Female/Married/Teacher/Christian/Head Teacher).

The increase in enrolment of the pupils because of the implementation of the programme was also recorded as stated by another head teacher.

*“The school witnessed massive enrolment over time, which is one of the major objectives of the programme. We have had many children who even come in by themselves to be enrolled. Others testify that their neighbors or siblings informed them about the care they receive in school and made them come to be part of it”.*

(KII/50years/Female/Married/Teacher/Christian/Head Teacher).

### **Research Question 3: What do stakeholders think about the performance of the NSIP in Makurdi?**

Stakeholders were interviewed to elicit their views about the performance of the NSIP in Makurdi. Evidence from the field through a focal person indicates that many of the stakeholders believe that the program had performed well.

*“My general appraisal for the whole NSIP is excellent. It gives beneficiaries a sense of belonging and being cared for by the government”.* - KII/52years/Male/Married/Civil Servant/Christian/Focal Person).

This view was also shared by a manager of the HGSFP who confirmed that the scheme had impacted lives of the pupils, cooks, and other stakeholders of the scheme *“My appraisal of the programme is that the programme is a very good one. Innovations and good practices have been the hallmark of the Benue HGSF programme, and this has contributed to programme success and notable achievements. Like I mentioned earlier, the programme has impacted the lives of the pupils and cooks as direct beneficiaries, job opportunities and income generation have impacted several indirect beneficiaries including farmers, transporters, food processors*

etc.” (KII/56years/Male/Married/Civil Servant/Christian/Manager HGSFP); He however stressed that inflation and the discrepancies in enrolment figures from the National Bureau of Statistics and increase in enrolment of the pupils because of the programme put a strain on the resource that was initially planned for:

*The rate of production menu items has increased by 50% for some (groundnut and soya beans) and over 100% for others (rice and fish). There has also been an improvement in the economy of families and the state based on the reduction of the state multidimensional poverty index (MPI) from 0.28% (2017/2018) to 0.25% (2018/2019). According to SUBEB in the state, the pupil enrolment figures increased by 85.6% between March and September 2017 with a further increase of 27.28% by September 2018. There were discrepancies between the states records and the physical count by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). As of September 2019, there was a drop in figure by 44.9% but in March 2020, the state recorded the figure of 482,499 which represented over 50% increase from inception confirming a positive impact and achievement of the programme in the state”.* - (KII/56years/Male/Married/Civil Servant/Christian/Manager HGSFP).

Another interviewee who was a teacher also affirmed that the scheme is a very good one stating that:

*“The programme I will say is good and should be expanded to cover a larger population”.*

- (KII/59years/Female/Married/Teacher/Christian/Head Teacher).

#### **Research Question 4: What are the challenges in the implementation of the National Social Investment Programmes in Makurdi?**

Although stakeholders of the policy perceived the policy as effective, findings from the study indicate that some challenges were faced during implementation. This study documented what the stakeholders think about the challenges encountered in the implementation of the program. Evidence from the field indicated that the programme encountered challenges that impacted its implementation. One of the challenges as stated by a manager of the N-Power unit in Benue State is that the Biometric Verification Number (BVN) information of beneficiaries of the programme did not align with their date of birth provided. In addition, some of the beneficiaries were absent from their Place of Primary Assignment (PPA).

*“The over-centralization of the programme, which brings about delay in the resolution of complaints. This affects interaction between beneficiaries and authorities who control the programme. Issues of beneficiaries’ bank account not aligning with the BVN information provided especially those who enrolled for BVN with their real date of birth but later swore affidavit in other to benefit from the scheme. Also, beneficiaries’ absenteeism at their primary place of assignment (PPA), the unnecessarily long procedure of collating names of potential beneficiaries for onward transfer to the main actors through the Focal person; the medium of application and mobilization/deployment seems to be more problematic now that it is done digitally when compared with the initial manual process for the first batch of beneficiaries, because most at times we or the enrollment officers encounter network challenges which results to errors that cannot be addressed at the state office except a protocol of complaint filing is followed to the national office and in the process, the volunteers keep pestering and complaining at our office here in large number”.*- (KII/49years/Male/Married/Civil Servant/Christian/Manager N-Power Unit).

Another challenge to the effective implementation of the programme was the delay in the

payment of beneficiaries, high cost of food and lack of proper planning from the government as stated:

*“Delay in payments; none payment in some cooking days/months; absence of a legal framework and administrative framework that ensures sustainability; inability of the state to make direct budgetary provision for the HGSFP; high cost of food items; the bank verification of cooks during their engagement process can be delayed and problematic due to low level literacy of cooks which can lead to errors in bank registration; the inability to promptly replace defaulting cooks without intervention from the national office and concerns with delays in the replacement process is also a deterrent to effective delivery; the National Bureau of Statistics conducted a headcount of pupils across Nigeria in 2019 which led to discrepancies between the state and NBS; and the ongoing joint harmonization process of the NBS and State pupil figures has led to reduction in funds allocation which resulted in some pupils not being fed”.*

- (KII/56years/Male/Married/Civil Servant/Christian/Manager HGSFP).

Shortage of meals, absenteeism of cooks, corruption and the refusal of pupils move to the next class in order not to miss the food that is served are some of the challenges that mar the implementation of the programme:

*“There is shortage of meals in some days; absenteeism of cooks; ghostcooks; at first most of the student in the classes that were being fed(primary 1-3), refused promotion to the next class in order not to miss the feeding benefit. This lingered for a while and even after they were cautioned, some returned to those classes to be fed. It always creates crisis between the pupils and whenever it is not noticed and identified in time, it resulted in food shortage due to a higher population than that which the cook had been given for the day”.*

- (KII/49years/Female/Married/Teacher/Christian/Head Teacher).

This view was also shared by another interviewee who was a head teacher in the school where the study was conducted.

*“Inadequate cooks due to non-replacement of ghost cook or promptaction on defaulters. Shortage of food if the funding is not reviewed due to the cost of food items in the market today”.*

- (KII/56years/Male/Married/Civil Servant/Christian/Manager HGSFP).

Another threat to the implementation of the programme is the centralization of the programme and technical challenges.

*“The most likely challenge to be encountered and that will serve as a hindrance in the programme implementation is the centralization of the NSIP which has a long chain/procedure for programme execution and communication. Another could be the digital enrolment procedure is likely to pose more challenges and hindrance to effective implementation of the scheme. This is because, technically, the system has not set a perfect standard for the smooth operation of the scheme both on the part of coordinators and beneficiaries. And another issue is the lack of internet access in some rural areas which hinders those in such areas from participating” (KII/49years/Male/Married/Civil Servant/Christian/Manager N-Power Unit).*

Evidence also suggests a shortage of funds and personnel as some of the factors that affected the implementation of the scheme as reported by a key informant who when asked about the challenges faced by the scheme said,



*“Shortage of funds; high cost of food items; delay in replacement of defaulters of deceased actors particularly cooks; skipping of payment and delay of payment of cooks”. - (KII/59years/Female/Married/Teacher/Christian/Head Teacher).*

## **5. Summary and Conclusion**

This study assessed the performance of the National Social Investment Programmes on the livelihood of beneficiaries of the programme in Makurdi. The study employed descriptive research designs and obtained data from ten (10) Key Informants who are stakeholders and beneficiaries of the programme. The qualitative data gathered from the study was analysed. Evidence from the study indicates that:

1. The programme provided employment opportunities for beneficiaries in Makurdi communities where the programmes were implemented. It could be inferred from this study that stakeholders and participants of the National Social Investment Programme find the scheme effective in improving the livelihood of not only the direct beneficiaries but also the economic advancement communities where the schools are situated.
2. Despite testimonies of successes recorded, the scheme also encountered numerous challenges in implementation. The challenges included discrepancies in BVN of beneficiaries which caused delayed payments, inadequate material, and human resources to effectively implement the program, and low level of commitment by beneficiaries.

The study concluded that effective planning and regular monitoring and evaluation are needed to improve the performance of the scheme in Markurdi, Benue State.

### **5.1 Recommendations**

The research has brought to light the issues surrounding public policies in a bid to alleviate poverty in Nigerian and why there is need for adjustment to ensure sustainability of the NSIPs. The following are policy recommendations:

1. Adequate budgetary allocations and personnel should be provided to guarantee effective implementation of the programme.
2. Beneficiaries should be paid on time to enable them to commit to the scheme and to avoid absenteeism.
3. The National Social Investment Programmes (NSIPs) should be decentralized to achieve better outcomes and guarantee sustainability, effectiveness, and efficiency of the scheme.
4. Effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should be put in place to improve the effectiveness of the programme.
5. The scheme should be scaled up and extended to other classes in the schools covered.

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