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GENDER ANALYSIS OF N-POWER BENEFICIARIES IN IMO STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The N-power program, which is the policy component for job development, is aimed at Nigerian male and female youth and seeks to combat poverty and unemployment. The study carried out gender analysis of N-Power beneficiaries in Imo state, Nigeria. Specifically, the study identify the different types of N-Power programs benefitted by male and female in the study area, assess the benefits of N-Power program on male and female beneficiaries, and ascertain the level of satisfaction of N-Power program by male and female. Data for the study were collected using structured questionnaire from 360 male and female beneficiaries of N-Power selected through multistage sampling technique. Data were analysed using frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, z-test, and ANOVA. Youth empowerment ($\bar{x} = 1.56$), and skill development ($\bar{x} = 1.47$) were indicated as high benefits of N-Power program by female beneficiaries; male beneficiaries indicated community development ($\bar{x} = 1.34$), and youth empowerment ($\bar{x} = 1.38$) as high benefits of N-Power program. Male respondents showed higher benefits mean score ($\bar{x} = 16.29$) compared to female respondents ($\bar{x} = 16.12$), and the z-value ($z = 0.221$; $p = 0.825$) reveals that there is no statistically significant difference in the benefits of N-Power between these two groups. The study concludes that both male and female beneficiaries indicated community development, youth empowerment, and skill development as high benefits of N-Power program in the study area. The study recommends that Federal Government of Nigeria should partner with private organizations to provide male and female beneficiaries of N-Power with more extensive exposure to the real-world work environment.

Keywords: N-Power, youth empowerment, gender analysis, unemployment, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The alarming and disconcerting poverty rate in Nigeria remains a significant concern. Despite the country's considerable potential in terms of natural, human, and numerical resources, a substantial portion of its population is still grappling with poverty, creating a paradox of destitution amidst abundance (Awogbenle & Iwuamadi, 2010). Na'Allah (2007) underscores this paradox by noting Nigeria's inclusion in the list of the 25 poorest nations globally. According to the United Nations

Development Programme (UNDP) report in 2010, the prevalence of poverty in Nigeria was evidenced by 68.7 million individuals living in impoverished conditions in 2004. Furthermore, a later report from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in the final quarter of 2016 revealed a staggering 112 million Nigerians, constituting 67.1% of the entire population of 160 million at that time, were living below the UN-defined poverty level of \$2 per day (Odey & Sambe, 2019). The statistics on poverty in Nigeria highlight distinctive features, including the concentration of impoverished individuals in rural areas who rely on precarious means of subsistence. Despite variations in poverty rates between the Northern and Southern regions as well as rural and urban areas, the most severely impoverished individuals in the nation are those residing in slums (Odey & Sambe, 2019). This underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions and comprehensive strategies to address the multifaceted challenges contributing to poverty in Nigeria.

Furthermore, the exacerbation of poverty in Nigeria can be attributed to various variables, encompassing an unpredictable political history, governmental corruption and mismanagement, the formulation of incoherent policies, shortcomings in implementation evaluation, an overreliance on oil, and inadequate infrastructure. The government has consistently responded to the escalating poverty trends in the country, with Okoro and Bassey (2018) highlighting numerous poverty reduction approaches that have been devised and implemented in attempts to address the prevailing poverty situation.

From 1999 onwards, several poverty reduction initiatives have been introduced, including the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), SURE-P, and N-SIP (Okoro & Bassey, 2018). Despite the implementation of these poverty reduction programs, observations by Kayode, Arome, and Anyio (2016) indicate that rather than being alleviated, the incidence of poverty in Nigeria continues to worsen. This underscores the urgency of revisiting and refining existing poverty reduction strategies to effectively address the multifaceted challenges contributing to the persistence of poverty in the country.

Moreover, among the key developmental challenges confronting developing nations like Nigeria, unemployment stands out prominently (Kayode, Arome & Anyio, 2016). The issue of unemployment in Nigeria appears to be on a steady rise, particularly among the working-age population, which constitutes a substantial proportion of the overall demographic. Compounding this challenge is the fact that more than half of Nigeria's population is under the age of 35, with youth constituting over half of the nation's demographic composition (Awogbenle and Iwuamadi, 2010; National Population Commission, 2013; Federal Bureau of Statistics, 2016).

Current data points to a significant portion of this youthful population being unemployed, with a noteworthy segment facing underemployment. The World Bank (2016) approximated Nigeria's youth unemployment rate at approximately 38%. This nexus between unemployment and disempowerment underscores the urgency of addressing the employment crisis, particularly among the youth, to unlock their potential and contribute meaningfully to the nation's development.

Addressing the widespread issue of unemployment and its purported link to poverty, as highlighted by Odey and Sambe (2019), the Federal Government of Nigeria initiated a comprehensive plan for job creation and youth empowerment in 2016. This initiative, known as

N-Power, operates under the umbrella of the Nigerian Government's National Social Investments Program, with a primary focus on projects that empower youth through volunteer work, poverty alleviation, and the creation of job opportunities for recent graduates. N-Power caters to both non-graduates and graduates, aiming to foster a culture of learn-work entrepreneurship among Nigerian youth aged 18 to 35 (Federal Bureau of Statistics, 2018).

According to Kabeer (2018), the program's objectives encompass reducing the nation's unemployment rate, facilitating the transfer of entrepreneurial, technical, and employable skills, and contributing to the government's active public service and diversification policy. Within the graduate category, N-Teach, N-Health, and N-Agro sectors have been established. Additionally, for the non-graduate category, the N-Build Scheme is specifically designed to equip participants with essential and appropriate tools for their chosen fields. This multifaceted approach reflects the government's commitment to addressing the complex challenges of unemployment and fostering sustainable youth empowerment in Nigeria.

The Federal Government introduced a National Social Investment Program known as N-Power, explicitly designed to empower young people and generate employment opportunities (Abin, 2018). One of the primary objectives of the program was to enhance the human capital of the Nigerian labor force (N-Power). This enhancement in human capital was particularly focused on addressing youth employment, as emphasized in the goal of youth empowerment outlined by Odey and Sambe (2019). The program aimed to achieve this by developing the skills of young individuals in crucial sectors such as agriculture, healthcare, and education, thereby ensuring their empowerment.

The overarching aim of the program was contingent on nurturing the talents of Nigerian youth, whether educated or uneducated, who faced limited prospects of securing employment, even at the most basic levels required (Odey and Sambe, 2019). In essence, N-Power sought to bridge the gap in opportunities for the youth and contribute to their holistic development and empowerment within the workforce. The National Social Investment Program (NSIP), bolstered by an extra \$1.3 billion injection into its budget, constitutes a suite of social safety net initiatives. Subsequently, the cash assistance, vocational training, and social intervention projects under these programs have had a direct positive effect on the lives of over 4 million individuals (Federal Bureau of Statistics, 2018).

The N-Power Program was established with the aim of mitigating widespread youth unemployment and fostering social security. Specifically tailored for Nigerians aged 18 to 35, the program strives to enable them to "acquire and develop life-long skills for becoming change makers in their communities." With a deployment of 500,000 trained graduates in various communities, the N-Power Program serves as a community-driven solution to address the nation's underdeveloped public services in areas such as education, healthcare, and civic engagement (N-Power, 2017). Structured to prepare young Nigerians for a modern, globalized economy, the program seeks to empower youths by imparting skills and certifications relevant to emerging global markets. Nigeria's aspiration to enhance its vibrant technology sector is evident through the

support for a talent pool comprising software developers, hardware professionals, and other tech-related skills, including animators and digital artists (N-Power, 2017).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

One of Nigeria's foremost socioeconomic challenges today revolves around the issues of poverty and unemployment. As per data from the Federal Bureau of Statistics (2010), over half of Nigeria's population currently resides in impoverished conditions, a persistently alarming trend that demands immediate attention at the federal level (Obadan, 2017). The enduring prevalence of poverty has not only failed to diminish but has also created fertile ground for other social problems such as armed robbery and burglary, as documented by Olajide and Diah (2017).

Various Nigerian administrations have introduced initiatives to grapple with this issue, including NAPEP, SURE-P, and the ongoing NSIP initiative. The National Social Investment Program (NSIP) is devised to address an array of social concerns, including poverty reduction, the rampant youth unemployment rate, promotion of entrepreneurship, and enhancement of school enrollment (Akujuru & Enyioko, 2019). The N-power program, a pivotal component of this policy focused on job development, specifically targets Nigerian youths with the aim of combating poverty and unemployment (Akujuru & Enyioko, 2019).

The N-power program, serving as the job development component of the policy, is directed towards both male and female Nigerian youths with the explicit goal of addressing poverty and unemployment. However, in the Nigerian context, the formulation and implementation of a strategy to attain predefined objectives for both male and female youths appear to be mutually exclusive. Hence, assessing the benefits of N-Power on the male and female beneficiaries deserves to be critically and scientifically analyzed especially in Imo state. In view of the foregoing, the research is set out to study the gender analysis of N-Power beneficiaries in Imo state, Nigeria by providing answers to the following research questions:

- i. What are the socioeconomic characteristics of male and female beneficiaries of N-Power in Imo state?
- ii. What are the different types of N-Power programs benefitted by male and female in the study area?
- iii. What are the benefits of N-Power program on male and female in Imo state?

Objective of the Study

The broad objective of the research is to study the gender analysis of N-Power beneficiaries in Imo state, Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

- i. delineate the socioeconomic characteristics of male and female beneficiaries of N-Power in Imo state;
- ii. identify the different types of N-Power programs benefitted by male and female in the study area;
- iii. assess the benefits of N-Power program on male and female in Imo state;

Hypotheses of the Study

The study hypotheses are stated in the null format; they are:

H₀₁: Male and female beneficiaries do not differ in the benefits of N-Power program in the study area.

Significance of the Study

Gender analysis of N-Power beneficiaries in Imo state, Nigeria is an important metric to determine the extent of participation in the government sponsored skills and employment programme. The study is significant because the N-Power programme, a federally financed national initiative in Nigeria, aims to reduce poverty by giving people access to possibilities for employment and skill development. Gender study of N-Power beneficiaries at the state level can shed light on how the program is running and whether it is succeeding in creating socioeconomic equality between men and women in Imo state. The study can help shed light on the ground level realities and identify any potential gender disparities in the N-Power beneficiary population, ultimately helping to ensure that the policy objectives of gender equality and women's empowerment are being achieved.

Scope of the Study

This study will focus exclusively on the recipients of the N-Power program in Imo State, Nigeria. The research will be confined to the identification of various N-Power programs and evaluating the impacts of the N-Power program on both male and female participants.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Poverty

Poverty is the state in which an individual lacks the resources required to fulfill basic necessities, as asserted by Ogunjimni (2022). According to Ali (2016), the perception of poverty can vary significantly when viewed through the lens of a person experiencing it. Due to its multifaceted nature, poverty is often defined by a state of low income or limited consumption, as articulated by Usman (n.d.). Alternatively, poverty can be conceptualized as a circumstance wherein individuals struggle to meet fundamental needs, including food, clothing, shelter, education, safety, and health. Ajakaiye and Adeyeye (2001) characterized poverty as a consequence of demographic factors such as education, health, and child mortality. Aderonmu (2010) describes poverty as the inability to control essential factors, depicting it as a condition wherein an individual lacks the means to provide for themselves and their family due to economic, social, political, and psychological constraints.

Poverty Situation in Nigeria

The escalation of poverty in Nigeria traces back to the oil boom of the 1970s, a period that propelled the nation to become the wealthiest in Africa. Unfortunately, subsequent military and civilian administrations neglected key sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, and education, concentrating wealth within patronage networks linked to the petroleum industry. Despite being

the largest oil producer in Africa, Nigeria has struggled to uplift living standards, and the 2016 recession, triggered by plummeting oil prices and production, exacerbated the economic challenges. The recent rebound in oil prices has contributed to the country's economic recovery, but addressing poverty and unemployment remains a critical concern, as highlighted by Adebayo (2018).

Adebayo (2018) reported that despite signs of renewed economic growth, substantial efforts are necessary to combat poverty. Shockingly, more than half of Nigeria's population, approximately 87 million people, are believed to be living on less than \$1.90 per day, surpassing India as the nation with the highest number of people in extreme poverty. According to the World Poverty Clock (2018), the number of Nigerians living in extreme poverty is increasing by over six individuals every minute. Onu et al. (2019) illustrated this dire situation through the story of Abdul Edosa, a high school dropout experiencing extreme hardship, as he described sleeping under a bridge and begging for sustenance.

Onu et al. (2019) further depicted the struggles of individuals like Fatima Ali, a 23-year-old mother of two, earning \$1.40 per day selling roasted peanuts, and Alkassim Ibrahim, a 45-year-old amputee living on the streets with minimal possessions. These narratives underscore the pervasive challenges faced by individuals in Nigeria, offering a glimpse into the harsh realities of poverty and its impact on diverse segments of the population.

The extensive history of corruption, inadequate governance, and a disregard for the rule of law in Nigeria has resulted in a substantial population living in poverty. As highlighted by Mwai and Goodman (2019), poverty rates tend to be higher in Northern States compared to various Southern states. Additionally, nearly 80% of employed individuals work in the unorganized sector or engage in what the UN categorizes as "vulnerable employment," signifying jobs without social security or other rights protections.

Description of N-Power

One of the primary developmental challenges confronting developing nations like Nigeria is the issue of unemployment (Kayode, 2014). In general, the upward trajectory of unemployment in Nigeria appears to be a persistent concern, particularly among the working-age population, which constitutes a substantial portion of the overall demographic. Moreover, the youth demographic constitutes more than half of the nation's population, with research indicating that over 50% of Nigeria's inhabitants are under the age of 35, leading to a significant proportion facing unemployment or underemployment (Federal Bureau of Statistics, 2016; Awogbenle and Iwuamadi, 2010; National Population Commission, 2013).

According to data from the World Bank (2016), Nigeria's youth unemployment rate is estimated to be approximately 38%. The nexus between disempowerment, unemployment, and poverty is evident, suggesting an interconnection between these concepts. Consequently, unemployment emerges as a considerable threat to both social and economic stability, potentially serving as a contributing factor to the elevated levels of poverty within the nation (Kabeer, 2003; ILO, 2012; Ajufu, 2013; DFID, 2017).

In response to the prevalent issue of unemployment and its perceived association with poverty and disempowerment, the Federal Government of Nigeria initiated a strategic plan for job creation and youth empowerment in 2016 (DFID, 2017; N-Power Information guide, 2017). The program's framework outlined four key growth sectors with substantial potential for generating employment opportunities, including construction, information and communications technology (ICT), agriculture and agro-allied businesses, as well as wholesale and retail trade (DFID, 2017). Within this framework, three primary components-N-power, Skills Acquisition, and Innovation Hubs-constitute the foundational elements for its implementation, as of the first quarter of 2016 (DFID, 2017). Specifically, the national social investment program known as N-power was established by the federal government with the explicit goal of empowering young individuals and fostering job creation, contributing to the enhancement of the human capital within the Nigerian labor force (N-Power Information Guide, 2017).

The focus on augmenting human capital appears particularly concentrated on the realm of youth employment, aimed at addressing the broader scope of youth empowerment. This involves the cultivation of skills among young people in crucial sectors such as agriculture, healthcare, and education (Okoro and Bassey, 2018; N-Power Information Guide 2017). The program's overarching objective revolves around skill acquisition and development for Nigerian youth, encompassing both the educated and uneducated segments who face challenges in securing employment, even at a basic sustenance level (Okoro and Bassey, 2018). Furthermore, the initiative was strategically designed to address staffing shortages in the teaching profession at the primary level, aiming to enhance basic education provision for children. Additionally, the program sought to alleviate staffing shortages in primary healthcare facilities and support agricultural enterprises experiencing understaffing challenges (Okoro and Bassey, 2018).

Numerous research endeavors have sought to evaluate the impact of the N-Power program on youth empowerment. One such study, conducted by Abin (2018), delved into the implementation process of the N-Power program and its effects on the socioeconomic well-being of participants in Akwanga Metropolis, Nasarawa State. The findings of this study indicated a positive influence of N-Power on the financial, material, and social well-being of its beneficiaries. Similarly, another study carried out by Okoro and Bassey (2018) specifically examined the competence and resource utilization of N-Power teachers, focusing on the implications for effective and efficient teaching in Nigerian primary and post-primary schools. Notably, this study focused solely on the N-Teach component of the program and assessed the qualifications of beneficiaries in terms of teacher preparation, aiming to discern the program's impact in this specific educational context.

Various Key Areas of N-Power Programme

N-Power, part of the National Social Investment Program initiated by the Federal Government of Nigeria, is designed as a job creation and empowerment effort. Geared towards young Nigerians aged 18 to 35, the N-Power program involves a two-year compensated volunteer commitment. As stipulated by the program, graduates are assigned primary duties in specified public services within

their localities. The N-Power Information Guide (2017) outlines that all beneficiaries of N-Power are provided with computers containing relevant information for their specific roles, as well as resources for ongoing training and development.

N-Power programme is divided into:

- i. Graduate Category which consisted of N-Power Volunteer Corps
- ii. Non-Graduate Category comprising of N-Power Knowledge and N-Power Build.

Graduate category of N-Power is expected to provide teaching, instructional, and advisory solutions in four key areas (N-Power Information Guide, 2017).

N-Power Health

N-Power Health beneficiaries are required to contribute to the enhancement and advocacy of preventive healthcare within their communities. Their responsibilities include supporting families, individuals, pregnant women, children, and other vulnerable segments of society. This program component is specifically designated for individuals with educational backgrounds in health and medical-related courses at the certificate course and diploma levels (N-Power Information Guide, 2017).

N-Power Agro

N-Power Agro beneficiaries are tasked with providing guidance to farmers across the nation, sharing the knowledge accumulated by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development in the field of extension services. Additionally, they are mandated to collect data on Nigeria's agricultural resources. This program component is designed for individuals with educational backgrounds in agricultural-related courses (N-Power Information Guide, 2017).

N-Power Tech

N-Power Teach Volunteers within this category are expected to contribute to enhancing the delivery of basic education in Nigeria. When there is a shortage of staff in Nigeria's primary schools, N-Power Teach Volunteers are deployed as teaching assistants. Their role involves providing support in teaching, school administration, and other classroom duties, without displacing existing instructors. These volunteers are tasked with helping extend elementary education to children residing in underserved areas, thereby aiding in the improvement of educational accessibility (N-Power Information Guide, 2017). The N-Power Teach curriculum also encompasses N-Power Teach (STEM), requiring young graduates to assist in the implementation of the Federal Government's STEM Program for primary and secondary schools in the nation. Applicants must possess skills and an interest in computer programming and other relevant subjects.

The Voluntary Asset and Income Declaration Scheme

The Voluntary Asset and Income Declaration Scheme (VAIDS) aim to motivate taxpayers who are either fully or partially compliant with tax laws to voluntarily disclose their accurate income and

assets, subsequently fulfilling their corresponding tax obligations. Within the N-Power VAIDS segment, participants are designated as community tax liaison officers and are entrusted with various responsibilities, including tax advocacy, document assessment, record maintenance, customer interaction, online inquiry response, report composition, and more. This particular category comprises young individuals with post-secondary qualifications in fields related to computer and information science (N-Power Information Guide, 2017).

Concept of Youth

The definition of "youth" varies among writers and international organizations, with no universally agreed-upon definition. Divergent perspectives on youth exist across researchers, writers, cultures, and societies. For instance, according to The United Nations (2005), youth encompasses individuals aged between 15 and 24. The World Bank (2007) extends the youth category to cover all young people aged 12 to 24. Torimiro et al. (1999) provide their definition, identifying youth as individuals within the age range of 13 to 30. Furthermore, the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2009) characterizes youth as all young men and women who are citizens of Nigeria and fall between the ages of 18 and 35.

The definitions of youth provided above predominantly rely on age ranges. However, youth encompasses more than just a specific age group. Beyond age, youth is associated with the inherent qualities of potential energy and innovativeness universally desired in young individuals. These distinctive characteristics may not be present in either childhood or adulthood. When we discuss and contemplate youth, it signifies a segment of young people in a society characterized by abundant energy, fresh ideas, and novel perspectives on life and problem-solving, as stated by Perez-Morales (1996).

One certainty is the ambiguity surrounding the demarcation between childhood and adolescence and between adolescence and adulthood. Defining youth on a global scale in terms of a specific age range can be challenging. Often, the United Nations and other entities employ age ranges primarily for statistical purposes. Beyond statistical definitions, the term "youth" continually evolves, influenced by changing political, economic, and sociocultural conditions. As the Federal Government seems to have employed this definition as a criterion for program eligibility, the definition provided by the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2009) is adopted for the study's purposes.

Meaning of Empowerment

In the existing literature, there is a lack of universally accepted definitions of empowerment. Various perspectives consider empowerment either as a means or an end goal (Per-Anders, 2008; Gibson, 1991). Per-Anders (2008) defines empowerment as the enhancement of an individual's control over factors influencing their quality of life. This enhancement can manifest through improvements in health, encompassing aspects like self-confidence, self-esteem, self-efficacy, or autonomy, as well as through increased knowledge, involving self-awareness, consciousness

raising, skill development, or competence. Additionally, empowerment may involve aspects of freedom, both positive and negative.

Empowerment, as described by Kabeer (2003), revolves around the ability to make decisions. Conversely, disempowerment entails the deprivation of choice, while empowerment serves as the mechanism through which individuals, previously denied the ability to exercise free will, acquire it. Nonetheless, Kabeer (2003) highlights that specific criteria must be fulfilled for choice to become a reality.

- i. Alternatives must be available. This involves the ability for decision-making. Consequently, poverty and disempowerment are often intertwined, creating challenges for individuals in meeting their basic needs. This interconnection results in dependency on others and hampers the capability to make impactful decisions (Kabeer, 2003).
- ii. Alternatives must not just be present but also be perceived to be present. The effectiveness of power relationships is often highest when they go unnoticed. While these behaviors may seem to reflect "choice," they are, in reality, rooted in the restriction of actual choices (Kabeer, 2003).

The concept of empowerment, as outlined by Kabeer (2003), encompasses three interrelated dimensions: agency, resources, and achievements. Agency involves the processes involved in decision-making and execution. It is crucial to the concept of empowerment. Resources serve as the means through which agency is employed, and achievements represent the outcomes of agency. These dimensions are intricately linked to one another. For the purposes of this study, the definition provided by Per-Anders (2008) will be adopted.

Empirical Studies on the Contributions of N-Power to Youth Empowerment

The comprehensive impact of Nigeria's N-Power initiative on youth empowerment remains a subject that requires more in-depth exploration. Abin (2018) conducted a study focusing on the effects of the N-Power Program on the socioeconomic lives of its recipients in Nasarawa state's Akwanga Metropolis. The findings of the research indicated a substantial improvement in the material, social, and financial well-being of the beneficiaries, accompanied by a high level of satisfaction among them. Recognizing that empowerment involves having control over one's life and the capacity to make decisions, it can be inferred that the program contributed to the empowerment of youth (Abin, 2018). The connection between financial security and increased freedom to make life choices in Nigeria further supports this perspective (Abin, 2018).

A study on "The impact of N-Power programs on poverty alleviation in Rivers State, Nigeria" by Enyioko (2020) reported that, Rivers State's kids are empowered by N-Power programs. A significant proportion of beneficiaries from N-Power programs in Rivers State comprises graduates from universities and polytechnics, as highlighted in the study on "The impact of N-Power programs on poverty alleviation in Rivers State, Nigeria" by Enyioko (2020). However, the effective implementation of these programs faces several challenges, including insufficient information dissemination, delays in stipend payments, issues related to bribery and corruption, inaccurate bank verification numbers, excessive political involvement, high

transportation costs for participants, website and internet problems, and inadequate program funding, all of which impact their efficacy in reducing poverty in Rivers State.

The research conducted by Ogunmodede et al. (2020) focused on the topic of 'Unlocking the Potential of Agribusinesses in Africa via Youth Participation: An Impact Evaluation of N-Power Agro Empowerment Programme in Nigeria.' The findings revealed that the N-Power Agro program had a positive and impactful effect on employment and income generation for the participating youth in Nigeria, resulting in an increase in their income levels.

Isa and Auwal (2019) conducted a study titled "Public Policy and Empowerment Programmes in Nigeria: Assessment of N-Power in Taraba State." The research highlighted the N-Power initiative as a short-term social investment program. One of the significant challenges identified in the program was its focus on educated individuals rather than the broader population. Additionally, research by Amah (2019) and Clarida (2019) indicated that the policy has been successful in maintaining low yields. In another examination of the implementation of N-Power programs in Nigeria, Ikande N. D. (year) raised concerns about the youth empowerment initiatives facing criticism and a lack of clarity regarding participant selection. The need for a more comprehensive implementation of national programs was emphasized.

Obagoblog (2017) highlighted concerns regarding the N-Power scheme's registration and verification processes in Nigeria, describing them as excessively demanding and poorly structured. The author expressed dissatisfaction with the frequent difficulties candidates face in accessing the official N-Power website. Furthermore, the article pointed out the perceived favoritism in the selection process, where only a fortunate few are assigned to programs like N-Power Health, N-Power Agro, and N-Power Tech to acquire new skills after passing the N-Power test, while others are hired as teachers. Deployment issues were also raised, noting instances where recipients are sent to locations far from their original registration despite providing accurate location information.

In an interview with the Sunday Guardian Magazine on 16 April 2017, Ebiri (2017) highlighted several systemic challenges that could potentially hinder Nigeria's N-Power programs. Issues such as inadequate information and incorrect bank verification numbers were cited as examples. These challenges have resulted in some N-Power beneficiaries encountering difficulties in receiving their monthly stipends of N30,000. Ani (2019) further emphasized other challenges faced by N-Power programs, including insufficient funding, delayed response times to emails from Abuja, communication gaps between Abuja and the states, program loopholes stemming from communication disparities, and inconsistent partial implementation.

In their evaluation of the competency and resource utilization of N-Power teachers, Okoro and Bassey (2018) emphasized the pressing necessity to reconsider the N-Power teacher scheme in alignment with a revised vision of Education for All (EFA) and social development. The selection of N-Power teachers did not take into account the qualifications of the teachers, leading to a situation where inadequately prepared individuals were handling various aspects of the classroom, as lamented by Okoro and Bassey (2018).

The literature and existing studies on poverty reduction programs in Nigeria were thoroughly reviewed for this study. Nevertheless, despite an extensive examination of numerous studies, it is evident that insufficient research has been conducted to ascertain the impact of the N-Power program on poverty alleviation specifically in Enugu State. The objective of this study is to address the identified gap in the current research landscape.

Limitations of N-Power to Youth Empowerment

Several studies have highlighted the challenges faced by the N-Power program in achieving effective youth empowerment in Nigeria. Abin (2018) pointed out issues such as delayed and insufficient stipend payments to participants. Another observed challenge was the program's excessive centralization, potentially impeding effective communication between program administrators and beneficiaries, limiting opportunities for program improvement through a better understanding of beneficiaries' needs. Additionally, Okoro and Bassey (2018) highlighted a deficiency in the program, noting that volunteers in the N-Teach strand were not adequately trained to become teachers before their deployment. This implies that the organization had not empowered these volunteers with the necessary skills for a teaching career before their placement.

Theoretical Background: Empowerment Theory and Poverty Reduction

Empowerment, as defined by Kabeer (2003), is the ability to make choices. Theories related to empowerment present two perspectives, primarily centered around entrepreneurship. One group, akin to the Schumpeterian entrepreneur, perceives entrepreneurship as a pathway to empowerment (Enyioko, 2020). The second group, reminiscent of Kirznerians, involves entrepreneurs seizing opportunities and mobilizing the necessary resources to exploit them. These viewpoints have given rise to two main schools of thought: the School for Empowerment Traits and the Management Skills School.

The School for Empowerment Traits posits that entrepreneurs possess inherent traits and are "born," asserting that empowerment is an innate quality that cannot be taught (Enyioko, 2020). In contrast, the Management Skills School contends that empowerment is a discipline that can be taught and learned, treating it as an acquirable skill. According to this school of thought, entrepreneurs are "created," not born. A strategic shift in N-Power programs is seen as instrumental in fostering an empowering spirit and culture among disadvantaged Nigerian youth. These programs play a pivotal role in cultivating an empowering mindset, providing unemployed youth with access to essential knowledge and skills. A well-executed N-Power initiative has the potential to instill motivation, knowledge, and skills, equipping unemployed youth to embark on successful entrepreneurial ventures.

METHODOLOGY

Study Area

The research was conducted in Imo State, situated in the southeastern region of Nigeria. Geographically, the state is positioned between Latitude 40 45N and 70 15N, and Longitude 60

501 E and 70 251 E, covering an area of approximately 5,530 km² (2140 sq. mi). According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2017), Imo State has a population of about 5,408,756 people. Predominantly inhabited by the Igbo ethnic group, there are also minority tribes such as the Hausa and Yoruba (National Bureau of Statistics, 2017).

Imo State is comprised of twenty-seven (27) Local Government Areas, with twenty-two (22) classified as rural and five (5) as urban, as defined by the National Population Commission (2006). These Local Government Areas are further organized into three (3) Senatorial zones, bordered by Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, and River states to the east, west, north, and south, respectively. The state experiences an average annual temperature of 20°C, resulting in an annual relative humidity of 75%. In the rural areas, agriculture is the predominant occupation, while trade and civil service are the primary activities in urban areas. The population predominantly follows Christianity, with a minority practicing Islam and traditional religions.

Sampling Procedure and Sample

The population of the study comprised all the registered beneficiaries of N-Power program in Imo state, Nigeria. Multi-stage sampling procedure was used to select male and female respondents from the target population in the study area as follows:

- i. All the three senatorial zones in Imo state were purposively selected. The three senatorial zones are Orlu, Owerri, and Okigwe. These are areas where N-power programs exist.
- ii. A purposive selection of three Local Government Areas from Orlu and Owerri zones each and two LGA from Okigwe zone was done based on the lists of Local Government Areas (LGA) that benefited from N-Power program in Imo state in each zone. The selected LGAs are Isiala Mbano, Onuimo (Okigwe zone), Aboh Mbaize, Ahiazu Mbaize, Ikeduru (Owerri zone), Nkwere, Ideato north, and Ideato south (Orlu zone).
- iii. In each of the chosen Local Government Areas, a simple random sampling was used to select nine (9) places of primary assignment for N-Power beneficiaries. The total number of places of primary assignment used for the study was seventy-two (72).
- iv. In all the chosen places of primary assignment, a simple random sampling was used to select 5 N-Power beneficiaries each.
- v. The above statistics gives a total of three hundred and sixty (360) male and female respondents that were used in the study.

Data Collection Instrument

Well-structured questionnaire was used to obtain data from the N-Power beneficiaries after validation by experts' judgment. Data for the study were collected from both the primary and secondary sources. The questionnaire was administered using face-to-face interviews schedule to elicit information on the socioeconomic characteristics of N-Power beneficiaries, types of N-Power programs benefitted by male and female, benefits of N-Power program on male and female, level of satisfaction of N-Power program by male and female, and challenges encountered by male

and female in N-Power program. The researcher trained and engaged enumerators to collect data for the study.

DATA ANALYSIS

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data. These include frequency, percentages, mean, standard deviation, z-test, and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA).

Objective I was achieved using percentage, frequency, mean, and standard deviation.

Objective II was achieved using percentage and frequency.

Objective III was achieved using percentage, frequency, mean, and standard deviation.

Hypotheses one were tested using z-test. The z-test is expressed as:

$$Z = \frac{\bar{X}_1 - \bar{X}_2}{\sqrt{\sigma^2 \left(\frac{1}{n_1} + \frac{1}{n_2} \right)}}$$

Where:

$\bar{x}_1$ and $\bar{x}_2$ are the means of female and male beneficiaries respectively

σ is the standard deviation of the samples

and n_1 and n_2 are the numbers of observations of female and male beneficiaries respectively.

Decision: p-value for F less than or equal to 0.05 is significant while p-value greater than 0.05 is not significant.

N = Number of groups

Decision: p-value for compared pair means less than or equal to 0.05 is significant while p-value greater than 0.05 is not significant.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results and discussion of the study were presented based on the specific objectives of the study as follows:

Socioeconomic Characteristics of the Respondents in the Study Area

Table 4.1 presents the distribution of N-Power male and female beneficiaries' socioeconomic characteristics in the study area. The result on female beneficiaries reveals that majority (65.8%) were between the age range of 29 and 37 years. The mean age of the female N-Power beneficiaries in the study area was 32 years. With respect to the male N-Power beneficiaries in the study area, Table 4.1 indicates that majority (53.2%) were between the age range of 29 and 37 years, 31.9% were between the age range of 38 and 49 years, while 14.9% were between the age range of 23 and 28 years. The mean age of the male N-Power beneficiaries in the study area was 33 years. It could be deduced from the result that both male and female N-Power beneficiaries are of the same age. Following this finding, it could be inferred that N-Power beneficiaries in the study area were mainly youth who might have need of empowerment for improvement in their living standard as

well as human capital development. This finding negates that of Odey and Sambe (2019) who found that majority of N-Power beneficiaries in Cross River state were between the age range of 24 and 26 years.

For marital status, the result in Table 4.1 reveals that majority (58.9%) of the female N-Power beneficiaries in the study area were married, while 41.1% were single. With respect to the marital status of the male N-Power beneficiaries in the study area, Table 4.1 shows that 53.2% were married, while 46.8% were single. From this finding, it could be deduced that both gender in N-Power beneficiaries in the study area were married and have some family responsible. The indication that lesser percentage of the male N-Power beneficiaries were married in the study area could be attributed to lack of resources by male needed to take care of their wife and children. This is necessary because some men would want to delay marriage until they feel financially secure, while women may place little or no emphasis on their financial strength before marriage. This finding negates that of Odey and Sambe (2019) who found that majority of N-Power beneficiaries in Cross River state were singles.

As revealed in Table 4.1, the household size of the N-Power beneficiaries in the study area ranges between 1 and 7 persons per household. With respect to the female N-Power beneficiaries, household size of between 1 and 3 persons constituted the highest percentage (61.6%), followed by household size of 4 and 5 persons (28.8%), and then 6 and 7 persons (9.6%). For the male N-Power beneficiaries, 74.5% had household size of 1 and 3 persons, 17.0% had household size of 4 and 5 persons, while 8.5% had household size of 6 and 7 persons. The average household size for both male and female respondents in the study area was 3 persons each. It could be deduced from this finding that N-Power beneficiaries in the study area had relatively small household size. This finding is not in consistent with Bede *et al* (2022) who found that in Imo state, the average household size was 5 persons. The rationale for the small household size among the N-Power beneficiaries in Imo state could be attributed to the fact that large household size might depict over dependency on the meagre household resources.

The finding on literacy level of the respondents was presented in Table 4.1. The finding reveals that for the female N-Power beneficiaries, majority (49.3%) had OND as their highest education attainment, 28.8% had BSc as their highest education attainment, 20.5% had HND as their highest education attainment, while 1.4% had WASSCE as their highest education attainment. With reference to the male N-Power beneficiaries, 53.2% had OND as their highest education attainment, 27.7% had BSc as their highest education attainment, 17.0% had HND as their highest education attainment, while 2.1% had WASSCE as their highest education attainment. From this finding, it could be inferred that all the male and female N-Power beneficiaries in the study area had one form of formal education or another. This finding agrees with Odey and Sambe (2019) who found that all the N-Power beneficiaries in Cross River state had one form of formal education or another. Since one of the goals of N-Power is skill development, it is important for the beneficiaries to have education as a prerequisite for participation because education serves as a foundation for skill development. When beneficiaries are educated before participating in N-Power

programs, they might have a better grasp of the training and skills provided, thereby, making it easier for them to learn and apply the knowledge effectively.

Table 4.1 reveals that majority of the female (68.5%) and male (53.2%) N-Power beneficiaries in the study area rarely underwent in-service training in their various places of primary attachment. The fact that majority of the respondents rarely received in-service training could impede their skill development as Eduwen (2016) opined that in-service training has the capacity to assist the beneficiaries to acquire new skills and improves existing ones. Beneficiaries who receive relevant training tend to be more productive in their roles, as they can apply their new knowledge and skills to their tasks (Eduwen, 2016). N-power programmes should have in-service training unit that prepares the beneficiaries on how to cope with the Programme, understand how to improve the backward areas and direct controls.

The result on respondents' cumulative monthly income is presented in Table 4.1. The finding shows that most (64.4%) of the female N-Power beneficiaries in the study area earned between ₦30000 and ₦40000 per month, 31.5% earned between ₦41000 and ₦50000, while 4.1% earned between ₦51000 and ₦60000. The average monthly income of the female N-Power beneficiaries in the study area was ₦38082.19. For the male N-Power beneficiaries, Table 4.1 reveals that 55.3% earned between ₦30000 and ₦40000 per month, 40.4% earned between ₦41000 and ₦50000, while 4.3% earned between ₦51000 and ₦60000. The mean monthly income of the male N-Power beneficiaries in the study area was ₦38404.25. it could be inferred from this finding that N-Power beneficiaries in the study area were low-income earners. Low income often leads to financial stress within households. Low-income households struggle to meet their basic needs such as quality foods, housing, healthcare, and education. The low income of these beneficiaries measures the high income inequality that exists between the minimum wage of the people in the state and the income of others. The cumulative monthly income of these beneficiaries is almost equal to the minimum wage in the state which is very poor to sustain the financial need of their families.

Table 4.1: Distribution of the Respondents According to their Socioeconomic Characteristics

Variables	Female (219)				Male (141)			
	Freq.	%	Mean	SD	Freq.	%	Mean	Std. dev.
Age								
23-28	39	17.8	32.17	5.33	21	14.9	33.49	5.48
29-37	144	65.8			75	53.2		
38-49	36	16.4			45	31.9		
Marital status								
Single	90	41.1			66	46.8		
Married	129	58.9			75	53.2		
Household size								
1-3	135	61.6	3	2	105	74.5	3	2
4-5	63	28.8			24	17.0		
6-7	21	9.6			12	8.5		
Highest level of education attainment								
WASSCE	3	1.4			3	2.1		
OND	108	49.3			75	53.2		
HND	45	20.5			24	17.0		
BSc	63	28.8			39	27.7		
Membership of social group								
No	123	56.2			78	55.3		
Yes	96	43.8			63	44.7		
Frequency beneficiaries received in-service training								
Rarely	150	68.5			75	53.2		
Regular	69	31.5			66	46.8		
Cumulative monthly income (₦)								
30000-40000	141	64.4	38082.19	8274.67	78	55.3	38404.25	8109.94
41000-50000	69	31.5			57	40.4		
51000-60000	9	4.1			6	4.3		

Source: Field Survey, 2023; % = Percent; Freq. Frequency; Std. dev. = Standard deviation

N-Power beneficiaries by Category of Program Benefitted

The result in Table 4.2 presents the distribution of beneficiaries of N-Power by the types of the programs. The average into the table reveals that majority (49.8%) of the female N-Power beneficiaries were in the N-Agro strand of the Programme, 21.9% were in the N-Power Teach, 11.4% were in the N-Power Tech (Software), 0.9% were in the N-Power Tech (hardware), while none was in the N-Power Tax, (2.3%) were in the N-power Build. For the male (17.0%) were in N-power Agro strand, (9.3%) were in the N-power Teach, N-Power beneficiaries, majority (34.8%) were in the N-Power Tech (Software), 26.9% were in the N-Power Build, 9.3% were in the N-Power Teach, while none was in the N-Power Tax. The variation of the number of percentages between male and female in Agro is likely because female will always priorities food related components in line with their reproductive task in different households. This is unlike the male who showed more interest in N-power Tech (software) because of their affinity in ICT and digital divided that exist between male and female.

This corroborate with the finding of Nwakwasi *et al* who found that male beneficiaries were more accessible to ICT than their female counterparts. This is because male outnumber the female as girls and women are systematically backed away from science and technological programmes in schools and colleges. The gender gap in science, technology, engineering and mathematics which enables women qualify in some of these carrier continues to widen. There preparation, opportunities should be revisited to enable them take up these jobs in the future. This finding in teaching disagrees with that of Odey and Sambe (2019); as well as Okoro and Bassey (2018), who found that majority of N-Power beneficiaries in their studies were in the N-Power Teach strand.

Table 4.2: Distribution of N-Power beneficiaries by type of program benefitted in the study area

Category of N-Power programs benefitted	Female (219)		Male (141)	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
N-Power Tech (Software)	25	11.4	49	34.8
N-Power Health	25	11.4	4	2.8
N-Power Tech (Hardware)	2	0.9	9	6.4
N-Power Creative	5	2.3	4	2.8
N-Power Agro	109	49.8	24	17.0
N-Power Build	5	2.3	38	26.9
N-Power Tax	0	0.0	0	0.0
N-Power Teach	48	21.9	13	9.3

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Benefits of N-Power program

Table 4.6 indicates community development ($\bar{x} = 1.49$), youth empowerment ($\bar{x} = 1.56$), skill development ($\bar{x} = 1.47$), reduced unemployment ($\bar{x} = 1.15$), reduction of poverty ($\bar{x} = 1.34$), work experience ($\bar{x} = 1.16$), and boosting productivity ($\bar{x} = 1.21$) as high benefits of N-Power program to female beneficiaries in the study area. However, digital literacy ($\bar{x} = 0.61$), employability enhancement ($\bar{x} = 0.84$), career path development ($\bar{x} = 0.69$), human capital development ($\bar{x} = 0.79$), and access to tools and resources ($\bar{x} = 0.97$) were not indicated by the female beneficiaries as high benefits of N-Power in the study area.

More so, Table 4.6 indicates community development ($\bar{x} = 1.34$), youth empowerment ($\bar{x} = 1.38$), skill development ($\bar{x} = 1.31$), reduction of poverty ($\bar{x} = 1.51$), reduced unemployment ($\bar{x} = 1.17$), and boosting productivity ($\bar{x} = 1.27$) as high benefits of N-Power program to male beneficiaries in the study area. However, digital literacy ($\bar{x} = 0.85$), employability enhancement ($\bar{x} = 0.87$), career path development ($\bar{x} = 0.63$), and national development ($\bar{x} = 0.48$) were not indicated by the male beneficiaries as high benefits of N-Power.

Following this finding, it could be inferred that male and female beneficiaries of N-Power in the study area indicated similar benefits of the program. The indication by male and female beneficiaries that poverty reduction was one of the benefits of N-Power corroborated the finding of Adeyanju (2019) who found that N-Power significantly contributed to poverty reduction among male and female beneficiaries in Nigeria. Again, digital literacy and employability with career path development are not in a crucial benefit to the beneficiaries and this program must make these inclusion as an interesting area in their intervention. This is very important part of development, which the state should include or design to achieve the long-run goal of N-power program in the country. There are ICT opportunities and employment generation which the program can leave - rage on. If the state wants to meet up with the global development initiative.

Table 4.3: Distribution of the respondents according to the benefits of N-Power program

Benefits of N-Power program	Female (219)					Male (141)				
	Hig h (%)	Lo w (%)	Not a benefi t (%)	$\bar{x}$	Std. Dev	Hig h (%)	Lo w (%)	Not a benefi t (%)	$\bar{x}$	Std. Dev
Community development	68.5	12.3	19.2	1.49	0.79	57.4	19.1	23.4	1.34	0.83
Youth empowerment	72.6	11.0	16.4	1.56	0.76	61.7	14.9	23.4	1.38	0.84
Skill development	65.8	16.4	17.8	1.47	0.78	59.6	12.8	27.7	1.31	0.88
Monthly stipend	46.6	30.1	23.3	1.23	0.80	48.9	17.0	34.0	1.14	0.90
Reduced unemployment	31.5	52.1	16.4	1.15	0.67	48.9	19.1	31.9	1.17	0.88
Work experience	37.0	42.5	20.5	1.16	0.74	31.9	42.6	25.5	1.06	0.75
Digital literacy	12.3	37.0	50.7	0.61	0.69	21.3	42.6	36.2	0.85	0.74
Employability enhancement	11.0	63.0	26.0	0.84	0.59	17.0	53.2	29.8	0.87	0.67
Reduced dependence on family support	6.8	65.8	27.4	0.79	0.54	10.6	59.6	29.8	0.80	0.60
Career path development	6.8	56.2	37.0	0.69	0.59	6.4	51.1	42.6	0.63	0.60
Human capital development	15.1	49.3	35.6	0.79	0.68	17.0	51.1	31.9	0.85	0.68
National development	1.4	38.4	60.3	0.41	0.52	4.3	40.4	55.3	0.48	0.58
Networking opportunity	2.7	28.8	68.5	0.34	0.53	2.1	36.2	61.7	0.40	0.53
Reduction of poverty	50.7	32.9	16.4	1.34	0.74	66.0	19.1	14.9	1.51	0.74
Boosting productivity	31.5	58.9	9.6	1.21	0.60	42.6	42.6	14.9	1.27	0.70
Access to tools and resources	28.8	39.7	31.5	0.97	0.77	36.2	44.7	19.1	1.17	0.72

Source: Field Survey, 2023; % = Percent; Std. dev. = Standard deviation

Hypotheses of the Study

Hypothesis 1

Male and female respondents do not differ in the benefits of N-Power program in the study area. The result in Table 4.7 shows that the null hypothesis is accepted. It indicated therefore that there is no significant difference between the benefits of N-Power among male and female beneficiaries in the study area. Male respondents showed higher benefits mean score ($\bar{x} = 16.29$) compared to female respondents ($\bar{x} = 16.12$), and the z-value ($z = -0.221$; $p = 0.825$) reveals that there is no statistically significant difference in the benefits of N-Power between these two groups (male and female beneficiaries). It could be inferred from the finding that both male and female beneficiaries expressed similar benefits of N-Power program in the study area. Similar expression of benefits of N-Power by both male and female beneficiaries indicate that the program promotes gender equity. Also, it suggests that both male and female beneficiaries received equal opportunities and support, which is a fundamental goal of many social empowerment programs. More so, the finding reveals that N-Power program effectively delivered skill development and trainings that were relevant to both male and female (Callistus and Desmond, 2020).

Table 4.4: z-test showing male and female beneficiaries do not differ in the benefits of N-Power program in the study area

Variables	F	$\bar{x}$	Std. dev.	Mean difference	z-value	df	p-value	Decision
Female	219	16.12	6.77	-0.17	0.221	358	0.825	NS
Male	141	16.29	8.10					

Source: Computed from Field Survey, 2023; df = degree of freedom, F = Frequency

CONCLUSION

Based on the finding, the study concludes that both male and female beneficiaries indicated community development, youth empowerment, and skill development as high benefits of N-Power program in the study area. Also, both male and female beneficiaries agreed that N-Power program provided them opportunity to interact with professionals and industry experts. From this study more women were in N-power Agro while there were more male in N-power Tech (software) than female. Male should be encouraged to partner with agricultural extension personnel so as to harness the opportunities that N-power Agro provides.

RECOMMENDATIONS

With respect to the finding, the following recommendations are considered important to improve N-Power program in Imo state and by extension, Nigeria:

- The women should take up science, technology and engineering Programmes to enable them qualify for their jobs upon graduation in, based on this, scholarship should be provided to women and girls who want to take up this Programme to enable women bridge the gender gap in ICT and engineering opportunities in the state in the future.

- ii. The financial independence offered to both gender by the Programme should be a stepping stone to drive a global inclusion in entrepreneurship development. Hence the study recommend that the state should organise an international forum where foreign investors will come and see the contribution to development offered by N-power programme in the state. The forum will provide a spring board to launch some beneficiaries to international collaborator and synergy.
- iii. There in less benefits desired from career path development, employability of the Programme and digital development. The global economic initiative is moving in this direction hence; the study recommends that attention and information should move towards this direction. The respondents are getting more satisfaction in the outcome of these Programme and satisfaction in the above goals should be inclusive. Hence, sponsorship in digital development is needed at this point to ensure an all-inclusive development that meet the global standard is achieved.
- iv. The study finds that poor supervision, attitude of the permanent staff and corruption to characterised the programme and recommends a control mechanism. The introduction of facilitators, who can demonstrate, teach and take records of some latent set-backs of the programme is important in improving the programme objectives and giving future intervention programme by the state.

Contribution to Knowledge

The increasing poverty and inequality gaps in both gender and income distribution of the state is set to be reduced by this N-power intervention Programme in the state. This study has however shown the importance of stepping the inclusion of women and girl child in science technology, engineering and mathematics Programme in the teaching curriculum using some motivational instrument. The study identified this need because the women becoming represented in the global development initiative will front Nigeria as a mere developed nation than the current record.

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