



THE IMPACTS OF N-POWER PROGRAMMES ON POVERTY REDUCTION AND YOUTH EMPOWERMENTS IN NIGERIA (A STUDY OF EKET SENATORIAL DISTRICT, AKWA IBOM STATE)

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Cite this article:

Okposin, F. U., Akpan, U. R. (2025), The Impacts of N-Power Programmes on Poverty Reduction and Youth Empowerments in Nigeria (A Study of Eket Senatorial District, Akwa Ibom State). African Journal of Economics and Sustainable Development 8(2), 145-168. DOI: 10.52589/AJESD-CRWO7AWR

Manuscript History

Received: 29 May 2025

Accepted: 2 Jul 2025

Published: 13 Jul 2025

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ABSTRACT: *This study employed survey design to investigate the impacts of N-power Programmes on Poverty Reduction and Youth Empowerments in Nigeria with special interest in the Eket Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State. Specifically, the trends and effects of N-teach and N-Agro on poverty reduction and youth empowerment were examined. The instruments for data collection were questionnaires and structured interview questions. A simple random sampling technique was adopted to select six hundred (600) N-Power beneficiaries from the three federal constituencies that made up Eket Senatorial District as the sample size for the study. The method of data analysis was both qualitative and quantitative, where comparative and descriptive methods were adopted along with the Student's t-test. The stylised facts illustrated that although the N-power programme has offered the beneficiaries a token of income, the income was grossly inadequate. The low income and inability of the beneficiaries to acquire basic goods and services for survival with dignity signified that the youths were not financially empowered; hence, poverty persisted. Also, the empirical evidence revealed that the p-value of 1 was greater than the significance level of 0.05 with a degree of freedom of 10; as such, the null hypothesis was accepted that no significant difference exists in poverty and youth empowerment between the periods of N-power and the period before the N-power programme. The paper recommended that the government should increase the Stipend to the new minimum wage, avoid delays in monthly Payments of Stipend and ensure a transition plan for the beneficiaries after their training.*

KEYWORDS: Poverty Reduction, Empowerment, N-Power, Training, Youths.



INTRODUCTION

Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa, is fortunate to have 160 million young people, or 70% of its population, as youths, according to estimates from the Nigeria Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2024). Nigeria's youth population, which is defined as people between the ages of 15 and 35, is typically described as vibrant, energetic, creative, and innovative. But the nation also faces significant challenges like high levels of unemployment, poverty and limited access to quality healthcare and education.

Kayode (2014) asserts that one of the main issues that many Nigerian households face is unemployment. It is particularly common among young people, who make up a large segment of the working-age population, with a high percentage of them being unemployed and a remarkable number being underemployed. According to World Bank estimates (2016), Nigeria's youth unemployment rate is approximately 38%.

Also, the World Data Lab (2022) stated that the outlook for reducing poverty in Nigeria is poor and that 120 million Nigerians are predicted to fall into poverty by 2030, making the country's unemployment and poverty trends worse. Ita and Bassey (2022) have identified a number of factors that contribute to this situation, including the economy's and education's poor state, a negative attitude toward agriculture, a lack of data on entrepreneurship and informal employment, a low rate of economic growth, and a false perception of technical and vocational education. The study also pointed out that a high rate of social vices, such as prostitution, armed robbery, oil bunkering, internet fraud, drug trafficking and addiction, rape, kidnapping, political thuggery, assassination, and other criminal activities, have been brought on by the high youth unemployment rate. Moreover, the aforementioned challenges were made worse by the rapid population growth and ineffective social safety nets.

Responding to these challenges, Akpan, Essien and Essien (2023) observed that the Federal Government of Nigeria in 2016 initiated the N-power programme as a poverty reduction and youth empowerment programme to solve the problems of poverty and unemployment in the country. With four primary components, N-Power Teach, N-Power Health, N-Power Agro, and N-Power Build, the N-power is a comprehensive intervention programme that aims to provide young Nigerians with the skills, knowledge, and attitudes they need to find work, start their own business, or continue their education. Each component of the N-power is specifically designed to address particular labour market gaps and needs.

Prior to N-Power, Akpan, Akpan, and Iwok (2024) believed that programmes like the Peoples Bank of Nigeria (PBN), Better Life Programme (BLP), Green Revolution (GRP), Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), and National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) were in place to confront the issues of poverty. The DFRRI was created in 1986 to build federal roads, provide rural water supply, and electrify rural areas; the NDE was established in 1986 to provide training, funding, and counseling for youths without jobs; the BLP was initiated in 1987 to provide empowerment, self-help, and rural development programs, as well as, skill acquisition and health care for rural women; the PBN was established in 1989 to promote savings and credit facilities for the underprivileged in both urban and rural areas; community banks were established in 1990 to run banking facilities for rural residents and microbusinesses in urban



areas; and the Poverty Alleviation Program (PAP) was implemented in 2000 as an interim measure to address the problems of rising unemployment and facilitate economic growth.

Also, Akpan, Essien and Essien (2023) elucidated that Nigeria created the Nigerian Economic Empowerments and Development Strategy (NEEDS) as its own version of the poverty reduction and eradication programme in 2004, along with other nations around the world that signed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) at the United Nations (UN) Millennium Summit. The following attainable objectives are included in the NEEDS document: Raise the average annual per capita consumption by at least 2%. By 2007, add roughly 7 million jobs and raise the proportion of people with access to clean drinking water to at least 70%. By 2007, raise the vaccination rate to 60%. Raise the adult literacy rate to at least 65% by 2007 and dramatically raise school enrolment rates, particularly for girls (Document on Needs, 2004).

The fact that Nigeria failed to meet the MDG targets outlined in the NEEDS document and never did so at the end of the pre-SDG period is a sad admission. As a result, poverty and unemployment have remained at the forefront of Nigeria's main problems. However, Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P) was created as a result of the Federal Government's decision, made under President Goodluck Jonathan, to stop providing price subsidies for petroleum products in January 2012. As stated by The National Planning Commission (2014), the SURE-P was created to help Nigerians lessen the effects of rising petroleum product prices.

Through the provision of vital infrastructure and safety net projects, the programme allocates the Federal Government's portion of the investable funds that result from the removal of petroleum subsidies into a variety of programmes aimed at boosting the economy and reducing poverty. This notwithstanding, research has revealed that SURE-P failed to meet the dire need of Nigerians in curbing poverty and unemployment. As confirmed by The National Planning Commission (2014), paucity of funds and insecurity were the major challenges of the SURE-P. It explains that the delay in the released of funds led to the inability of the programme to achieve most its set objectives

Data from NBS labour force Statistics (2022) revealed that the population of Nigeria was 206 million, while that of Akwa Ibom State was 7 million, respectively, as of July 2022. Out of this total, approximately 35 percent of the population at the national level and over 52 percent of the youth in Akwa Ibom State were unemployed. Prior to this, the NBS published that in the last quarter of 2020, the population of unemployed people in the country stood at 33.3%, an increase of 6.2% points compared to 27.1% in the second quarter of the same year.

According to Kibirige (1997), lack of a highly productive labour force may lead to limited food supply and low income and poor health can affect employment. Poor living conditions often expose households to increasing risk of various diseases, poor education and low productivity. For this reason, Bloom and Canning (2003) opined that by improving health and education in Africa, the citizens may contribute to development in the following ways: (i) greater productivity at the workplace, which is synonymous with improved income; (ii) the ability to work much longer and retire later due to overall good health; (iii) investing more in their own education and training, leading to enhanced productivity; and (iv) greater capacity to save and invest more with the expectation of a longer life.

As such, in 2016, the Federal Government of Nigeria, under the leadership of President Muhammadu Buhari, launched the N-power programs as part of the National Social Investment



Programme (NSIP) with the purpose of bringing Nigerians out of poverty through investment, capacity building, and direct assistance to N-power beneficiaries. N-power is an employability enhancement programme that aims to improve the income status of young Nigerians between the ages of 18 and 35, improve public service delivery in key focus areas, and promote social, economic, and financial inclusion. It is on this note that the researchers chose to investigate the effect of N-power programmes on poverty reduction and youth empowerment in Nigeria, as evidenced in the Eket Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State.

Problem Statements/Justification

Poverty has garnered development attention since the start of this millennium and is widely recognised as a significant global development challenge. For this reason, the United Nations (UN) adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) at its Millennium Summit in New York City in 2000, aiming to cut poverty in half by 2015 and end poverty in all of its manifestations worldwide by 2030. In 2015, the United Nations held another summit at its headquarters in New York with the theme "Eradicating Poverty in all its Dimensions and Addressing Inequality" to reiterate the importance of poverty reduction on a global scale and to reinforce the MDGs. In order to eradicate poverty and maintain a favourable environment for both the current and future generations, the more than 149 member states signed and embraced the widely recognised Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the conclusion of the summit.

However, Nigeria, despite being the biggest economy in Africa, is faced with major challenges of poverty and youth unemployment. The nation's high unemployment and poverty rates have had a long-term impact on its people, especially the youths. According to a 2018 Brookings Institution report, Nigeria has surpassed India as the world's poverty capital, with 86.9 million people living in extreme poverty in the same year. "Much of Nigeria is thriving, with many individuals enjoying the fruit of a resurgent economy," British Prime Minister May (2018) confirmed, adding that 87 million Nigerians live below \$1 and 90 cents per day, making it home to more very poor people than any other country in the world.

Poverty in Nigeria worsened since the 1980s and became pervasive in the 2000s. That is why in 2022, the NBS reported that 63% of persons (133 million people) living within Nigeria are multidimensionally poor. The Nigeria population and poverty trend from 1980 to 2020 reveals a positive relationship between population and poverty in Nigeria as presented below:

Table 1.1: Population and Poverty Trend in Nigeria from 1980 to 2020.

Year	Population	Poorest persons	Percentage of poor
1980	68.45m	4.24m	6.2%
1985	83.61m	10.12m	12.1%
1992	100.22m	13.93m	13.9%
1996	110.73m	32.4m	29.3%
2004	135.39m	29.79m	22%
2010	158.58m	61.37m	38.7%
2015	181.15m	76.46m	42.2%
2020	208.3m	89.0m	42.72%

Source: Computed by researcher using NBS and World Bank Report Various Issues



According to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (2018), by 2050, more than 40% of the world's poorest people would reside in Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Also, weak job creation and entrepreneurial prospects stifled the absorption of the 3.5 million Nigerians entering the labour force every year, and many workers choose to emigrate in search of better opportunities.

In addition, poverty in Nigeria was exacerbated by food insecurity and nutritional challenges. As reported by the Food Security Index (2018), Nigeria with 38 out of 100 points was ranked 96 out of 113 countries ranked on food security. Implying that 36.4% of the population was food insecure and; 7.9% of the population was undernourished. And, in the 11th edition of the Global Food Security Index (GFSI, 2022), Nigeria with 42.0 points was ranked 107th out of 113th countries globally in the food security index. This means that 12.9 percent of the global population in extreme poverty was found in Nigeria as of 2022. Also, in May 2024, Nigeria's annual inflation rate increased from 22.22 percent to 22.41 per cent, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). The food inflation rate increased from 24.61 percent in April to 24.82 percent in the same period, following a similar pattern. As a result of government policies like the decision to unify exchange rates and the immediate removal of gasoline subsidies, which raised transportation costs and made the situation of food insecurity deteriorate even more.

On education, the NBS-Multi Indicator Cluster Survey report (2018) indicated that only 60.9% of 33,647 children currently attended primary school and 46.9% of 24,855 attended secondary school in Nigeria. Also, UNICEF (2020) mentioned that the primary school completion rate in Nigeria was only 59% for boys and 51% for girls, whereas the secondary school completion rate was as low as 42% and 36% for boys and girls, respectively, in 2020. UNESCO (2024) emphasised that even though primary education is officially free and compulsory, 10.5 million children were not in school.

The aforementioned clarifies why the Federal Government of Nigeria launched the N-power and other Nigeria Social Investment Programmes (NSIP) in an intentional attempt to lift Nigerians out of poverty via investment, capacity building, and direct assistance to recipients. The justification of this research is to examine the extent to which the goals of N-power programmes are being met, identify the plausible reasons behind the increase in poverty and unemployment rates despite the N-power programmes over the years, identify the challenges faced by the programmes and proffer solutions to those problems, and generate data that will support policy reforms and redirect the Federal Government attention to better ways of scaling up the programmes and improving the scheme to meet the desired goals and for the overall benefit of Nigerians.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of this study are to:

1. Examine the impacts of N-Teach and N-Agro Programmes on Poverty Reduction and Youth Empowerments in Nigeria
2. Identify the plausible reasons behind the increase in poverty and unemployment rates despite the N-power programme over the years.
3. Identify the major challenges facing the N-power programme in Nigeria.
4. Proffer suggestions on how best to overcome the challenges.



Research Hypothesis

The hypothesis of the study is stated in this section as follows:

1. There is no significant impact of N-Teach and N-Agro on Poverty Reduction and Youth empowerment in Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review presented in this section is arranged under the following subheadings: Conceptual literature, theoretical literature, empirical literature and a summary of the related literature reviewed.

Conceptual Literature

a. The Concept of Poverty

The word “Poverty” is one of the most difficult concepts to explain due to its various characteristics. This is to say that “Poverty” is multidimensional, individual or context-specific, relative and absolute with its own language and vocabulary. Hence, Gweshengwe *et al.* (2020) opined poverty is one of the defining challenges of the 21st century facing the world. However, the World Bank (1999) emphasised that poverty analysis in any given community should start by ascertaining local poverty terminologies. This is because poverty terminologies point to different dimensions or forms of poverty within the communities and reduce the confusion or misinterpretation associated with each of the dimensions of poverty.

Poverty has rich vocabularies with local terminologies in every society. For instance, in Ibibio communities of Akwa Ibom State, which the Eket Senatorial district is one of, the following vocabularies have been used to define poverty: Uwene (poor); Akpòikpòì Uwene (Absolute or Abject or extreme poverty); Unana ukeme (lack of capability to function); Unana akAk (lack of Money or income); Unana Ifiok (lack of education or knowledge); Unana Nditò (Lack of Children); Unana Ufòk (lack of shelter); Unana ndidia (lack of food); Unana Utom (lack of job or paid employment), etc.

Also, there are several ways through which definitions of poverty have been categorised. Some of the categorisations of poverty definitions include statistical definitions, income-based definitions, living standards definitions, political definitions, capabilities definitions, social definitions, expert-derived and ordinary people-derived definitions of poverty. However defined, there is a consensus among researchers that any definition of poverty should form the basis on which interventions are drawn (Ife and Tesoriero, 2006). For instance, Statistical definitions refer to definitions of poverty that tend to use figures, numbers and percentages to define poverty. The World Bank defines poverty as any income below US \$1.25 a day for the poorest countries and US \$2 a day for developed countries. This means that the World Bank is bound to use different poverty lines to define poverty depending on country-specific contexts (Ravalion, 2003).



Akpan, Essien and Essien (2023) define poverty in two ways: first, as “the state of being poor” and second, as “the state of being inferior in quality or insufficient in amount”. To them, the second definition was very useful, as it reflects the quality of people in poverty. Therefore, Poverty is a condition of being lower in status or quality than others who are rich. Hence, Standly and Dirisu (2010) elucidated that the word “poverty” suggests a standard of living below the minimum needed for the maintenance of life and health. As stated by Sen (1999), poverty is defined as “a lack of capability to function”, which can be caused by a lack of income or some other forms of social deprivation. As such, Sen (1999) view of poverty as “capability deprivation” extends the concept of poverty beyond the income poverty perspective. Moreover, this study adopts the definition of poverty by the United Nations (2005) charter on poverty, which states that poverty is a pronounced deprivation in well-being comprising many dimensions. The dimensions include low income and the inability to acquire the basic goods and services necessary for survival with dignity, low levels of health and education, poor access to clean water and sanitation, inadequate physical security, lack of voice and insufficient capacity and opportunity to better one’s life.

b. The Concept of Empowerment

Empowerment is a labour economics abstraction that refers to the transfer of labour skills and responsiveness to a physically and mentally capable individual or group of individuals so that they can take part in the distribution and utilisation of economic and social capital for significant personal gain and the advancement of our society. Accordingly, empowering a person entails educating, training, and helping a person acquire a skill or means of subsistence so that he/she can live as effectively and efficiently as possible in the society. It entails integrating someone into a career that will sustain them and help them overcome obstacles like poverty, lack of resources, and boredom. The specific ways through which youths can be empowered include:

1. **Educating them:** By this we mean giving the youths an opportunity to receive quality education and the benefits of socialising with others and learning problem-solving techniques as embedded in basic education. All learners who acquired the nine years of basic education should be equipped with relevant levels of literacy, numeracy and manipulative, communicative, and lifelong skills, as well as the ethical, moral, and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for lifelong learning and the basis for scientific and reflective thinking (Universal Basic Educations (UBE) Act, 2004, p. 16).
2. **Teaching them Entrepreneurial Skills:** This refers to the act of training the youths to undertake various crafts, jobs, and careers. The goal of education is to impart one valuable skill. Some individuals possess multiple talents and can acquire various skills to generate wealth. Others need to be able to work in order to make a living. One can be a skilled worker, semi-skilled worker, or artisan. Among the members of the artisan group were shoemakers, street sweepers, labourers, farmers, traders, and others. Drivers, masons, tailors, electricians, technicians, and so forth are examples of semi-skilled workers, whereas teachers, surveyors, physicians, engineers, priests, administrators, technologists, computer specialists, and others are examples of skilled or professional workers.
3. **Indoctrinating them:** The process of instilling a self-sustaining conscience in a person is known as indoctrination. It is a process of helping an individual to internalise morals,



values, and faith in society and God, as well as the necessary discipline to deal with life's social demands. One's conscience is still centred on morals and social values, which guide him to live a meaningful life and allocate the resources at his disposal to community service and personal growth.

Also, Perkins (2010) defines empowerment as a deliberate, continuous process that is focused on the local community and involves mutual respect, critical reflection, caring, and group participation. It is a process that gives people who do not have an equal share of valuable resources more access to and control over those resources; it is a process that gives people a critical understanding of their surroundings, control over their lives, and democratic participation in community life. The definitions of empowerment share the following characteristics: (a) empowerment is a process; (b) empowerment takes place in communities; (c) empowerment entails active participation, critical reflection, awareness, and understanding. (d) it means caring for the powerless by giving them power to function and, (e) empowerment entails access to and control over important decisions and resources.

c. The Concept of N-Power

The Federal Government of Nigeria sponsors N-Power, a youth empowerment programme designed to address the issues of poverty and youth unemployment by offering a framework for the extensive and pertinent acquisition and development of work skills while connecting its main goals and outcomes to improving subpar public services and boosting the overall economy. N-Power gives young people in Nigeria a platform to work while developing their skills. Nigerian nationals between the ages of 18 and 35 are the target market for N-Power. Each participant will be guaranteed to learn and practice the majority of the skills required to find or create work through the N-Power modular programmes (FGN, 2018). N-Power Graduates Categories and N-Power Non-Graduates Categories are the two broad categories into which the N-Power programmes are generally divided. The N-Power Non-Graduate Category: this provides training and certifications in 2 key areas, which include

i. N-Power Knowledge: The Federal Government's initial move towards diversification into a knowledge economy is the N-Power Knowledge program. In order to support the incubation and acceleration of the technology and creative industries, this program collaborates with the eight innovation hubs that are planned to be established throughout the nation. The program, which is a "Training to Jobs" initiative, basically makes sure that participants can enter the workforce as independent contractors, employees, or business owners.

ii N-Power Build: N-Power Build is an accelerated training and certification (Skills to Job) programme that will engage and train 75,000 young unemployed Nigerians in order to build a new crop of skilled and highly certified technical know-how.

The N-Power Graduate category, also called N-Power Volunteer Corps, is a post-tertiary engagement program for Nigerians in the 18–35 age range. It is a paid volunteer program for two years. In their local communities, the graduates performed their primary duties in designated public services. All N-Power Volunteers are entitled to computers that will hold data for their ongoing training and development, as well as data relevant to their particular role. According to Akpan, Essien and Essien (2023), the four main areas in which N-Power volunteers offer teaching, instructional, and advisory services are as follows:



- i. **N-Power Agro:** N-Power Agro Farmers nationwide receive advisory services from volunteers. They spread the information that the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development has compiled about extension services.
- ii. **N-Power Health:** N-Power Health Volunteers help improve and promote preventive healthcare in their communities to vulnerable members of the society, including pregnant women and children and to families and individuals.
- iii. **N-Power Teach:** N-Power Teach Volunteers will help improve basic education delivery in Nigeria. N-Power Teach Volunteers will be deployed as teacher assistants in primary schools around Nigeria.
- iv. **N-Power Tax:** N-Power volunteers will be selected to work as Community Tax Liaison Officers in their states of residence with the state's tax authorities. The N-Power community tax liaison officers will have responsibilities which will include answering online enquiries, customer management, and creating awareness of tax compliance (FGN, 2016).

Theoretical Literature

The theories proposed for this study are: Individual deficiency theory, progressive social theory and Human Capital theory by Smith (1776) and Becker (1964).

(a) **Individual Deficiency Theory:** This theory's proponents blame poverty on personal shortcomings. Poverty can be caused by a lack of employment, laziness, or both. People in poverty are accountable for their situation due to their poor decisions and lack of diligence. They believe that the poor person's intellectual deficiencies, inaction, or counterproductive activities are the causes of poverty. Many also believed that poverty is a generational curse, as many were born into a cycle of poverty passed from one generation to the other. The question here is, is there anything that governments and decision-makers can effectively do to provide support and incentives for the poor people to make right decisions and choices that can reduce their levels of poverty?

(b) **Progressive Social Theory:** According to Akpan, Essien and Essien (2023), this theory elucidates that economic, social, and political injustices and discrimination that restrict people's access to resources and chances to build wealth and escape poverty are the root causes of poverty. Due to flawed social, political, and economic structures, people can work hard and have a respectable attitude but still fall into the poverty trap. For example, studies have demonstrated how the capitalist economic system purposefully maintained low wages by fostering a high rate of unemployment. The theory also revealed a flaw in the system that links poverty to discrimination against individuals based on personal characteristics such as gender, religion, race, and disability, which restricts opportunities despite an individual's abilities.

(c) **Human Capital Theory by Smith (1776) and Becker (1964)**

The proponents of Human Capital Theory (HCT), Smith (1776) and Becker (1964), emphasised investment in education as a solution to poverty. HCT states that the educated population is the active population. The basic concept of the HCT is that investment in individuals can be mathematically measured based on the value they are able to contribute to society (Akpan, Okposin and Iwok, 2023). The HCT emphasised the intangible economic value of a worker's experience and skills. The implication of this theory is that if the people in poverty



are being empowered, then they can increase their productive capacity through greater education and skills training that will enable them to change the trajectory of their poor situation and then contribute meaningfully to themselves and the development of the society at large.

Empirical Literature

The effectiveness of skill acquisition and training in reducing unemployment and poverty in Kogi state, Nigeria, was examined by Adofu and Ocheja (2013). This relationship between entrepreneurship skill acquisition and poverty/unemployment was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The descriptive tools included tabular presentations of frequencies and percentages. Using primary data collected in six local government areas that comprised the four districts of the state, a chi-square test (χ^2) was used to determine whether or not the effect of entrepreneurship skill acquisition on poverty alleviation and unemployment reduction in Nigeria was valid. According to the results, 65% of the respondents agreed that the high rate of unemployment and poverty in Nigeria is caused by young people's lack of entrepreneurship skills. At least 60% of those who benefited from the skills acquisition programme can now afford the necessities of life, according to the results. Therefore, the study suggested that the government start considering how to advance the programme to eradicate unemployment and poverty since the majority of those who benefited from it could afford the necessities of life.

Kanyenze, Mhone and Sparreboom (2000) opined that youth marginalisation in Anglophone Africa will decrease with training in vocational and technical skills. Six Anglophone African nations—Egypt, Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe—were surveyed. The results showed that although these nations have implemented a number of skill-building initiatives, unemployment and poverty rates were still rising. Therefore, they suggest that rather than being seen as a singular or exceptional anomaly of an otherwise employment-friendly environment, youth unemployment and poverty should be seen as a symptom of the larger structural issue that affects both adults and youths. Accordingly, the argument is that policies intended to improve youth welfare and employability should ideally be implemented within the larger framework of policies intended to increase African economies' overall capacity to absorb labour.

According to Akpama et al. (2011), young adults who took part in skills acquisition programmes saw a significant decrease in poverty as a result of gaining vocational skills. The tools required to launch a new company or career are the main focus of interdisciplinary training known as entrepreneurial studies. They advise that in order to combat poverty and unemployment, which have reached concerning levels, Nigeria must teach its youth entrepreneurship skills through technical, vocational education and training, as the country is rapidly becoming a largely young society with a high unemployment rate.

In their study, Ekong and Ekong (2016) examined how the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) in Akwa Ibom State addresses the issue of unemployment through skill acquisition. They used primary and secondary data from secondary sources for the years 1987 to 2012 and discovered a positive correlation between NDE's skill acquisition and unemployment reduction in Akwa Ibom State, despite the lack of significant obstacles. They suggest expanding the number of NDE training centres to all Local Government Areas in the state to maximise the benefits.



Akpan, Essien, and Essien (2023) examined how the N-power program affected unemployment and poverty reduction in Nigeria. In order to compare the two periods, secondary data from 2014 to 2021 were sourced from NBS for the study. The data was analysed using Fisher's student t-test, charts, graphs, and tables. Since poverty rates during N-power average 41.26% and vary over the six years of program implementation, the results of the stylized facts showed that there was no discernible decrease in poverty rates. The lack of a statistically significant difference between the two periods' poverty reductions was confirmed by the p-value of 0.1748, which is greater than 0.05. As the country's unemployment rate continues to rise, the results also indicate that the N-Power programme has not been successful in reducing unemployment. In order for the programme to be successful in reducing poverty and unemployment, the paper suggests that the federal government should have a plan in place for the transition of beneficiaries to long-term employment, which can be accomplished by providing them with employment opportunities within government ministries and agencies and encouraging the private sector to hire them after a period of training. Additionally, beneficiaries can receive interest-free loans and mentorship to start their own small businesses and hire others.

Summary of the Literature Reviewed

In summary, the literature reviewed has revealed that causal relationships exist between Social Investment Programmes (SIPs) and Poverty Reduction/Youth Empowerments. However, the effect of SIPs on Poverty varied across households and countries due to differences in poverty measurements and the types of programs reviewed by each of the researchers, study characteristics, model specifications, types of data used, quality of research and the level of socioeconomic development of the countries observed. Most of the studies reviewed focused either on a single state in a country, a central government or a continental analysis. In doing this, they are deprived of the critical information that points to each household in a certain part of a state (like the senatorial districts) as a unique entity different from those in the other parts of the same state. This study ensured that the gap noticed in the literature is addressed by analysing the effects of N-power on poverty and youth empowerment in the Eket senatorial district as a critical unit of Akwa Ibom state in Nigeria. Although there are other works on N-Power programmes in Nigeria, we did not come across anyone carried out in the Eket senatorial district. Hence, society will benefit from this work and efforts to reduce the gaps in the socioeconomic status among households in the Eket senatorial district in particular and the country at large.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A Survey Research Design was adopted for this study. In this procedure, the researchers collected quantitative, numbered data using questionnaires and one-on-one interviews and statistically analyzed the data to describe trends about responses to questions and to test the research hypotheses.

Area of Study

This study was carried out in Eket Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Eket Senatorial District has its head office in Eket Local Government Area as one of the three



Senatorial Districts in Akwa Ibom State, South-South, Nigeria. It has twelve (12) out of the thirty-one (31) local Government Areas in the State. The Local Government Areas are Eket, Ikot Abasi, Mkpato Enin, Onna, Esit Eket, Ibeno, Okobo, Oron, Udunguko, Urueoffong/Oruko. Eastern Obolo and Mbo. Eket Senatorial District is also known and called Akwa Ibom South Senatorial District. The people of Eket Senatorial District are predominantly the Ibibios, multicultural and multilingual from different ethnic groups of Iron, Opobo, and Eki, with the mother of all the ethnic groups being the Ibibio. Eket senatorial district is characterised by a tropical climate with heavy rainfall, significant oil and gas exploration activities, and a predominantly farming and fishing economy. It is situated along the coastal belt of Akwa Ibom State, bordering the Atlantic Ocean. Eket Senatorial District has a population of One Million, Nine Hundred and Thirty Eight Thousand, Two hundred and Two (1,938,202) and a Poverty rate of 29% (National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 2006).

Population of the Study

The population for this study comprises all the N-Agro and N-Teach beneficiaries of N-Power programmes in Eket Senatorial District, estimated to be 3278, Three thousand, two hundred and seventy-eight) (Social Investment Programme Office, Uyo).

Sample and Sampling Technique

The Sampling technique adopted for this study is Cluster Random Sampling Technique. Cluster sampling is a probability method where the researcher divides the entire population into separate groups, or clusters. Then, a random sampling of these clusters is selected and all observations within the chosen clusters are included in the sample. This method is useful when the population is large, widely dispersed, and partly inaccessible. The sampling technique is suitable for this study and very easy to use since the area is already divided into clusters. Eket senatorial district is divided into: (i) Twelve (12) Local Government Areas and, the 12 Local Governments Areas can be regarded as 12 clusters. (ii) Nine (9) State Constituencies and the 9 state constituencies are regarded as 9 clusters. (iii) three (3) Federal Constituencies which are also regarded as 3 clusters.

However, for easy access to the area and effective research, the researchers adopted the three federal constituencies as 3 clusters and then used a two-stage random sampling technique to select the sample size. In the first stage, two Local Governments per Federal Constituencies were randomly selected to have a total of six Local Governments and, in the second stage, one hundred (100) respondents were selected from each of the six Local Governments which gives a total of six hundred (600) N-Power beneficiaries as the sample size for this study.

Instrumentation

The instruments for data collection were questionnaires and structured interview questions. The major Instrument named **the N-Power Impact Assessment Questionnaire** was validated by experts in the field of Test, Measurement and Evaluation from Akwa Ibom State College of Education, Afaha Nsit and University of Uyo, Uyo. While the researchers accompanied by research assistants visited in person, those clusters in Eket Senatorial District were selected for this study to administer the questionnaire and interview questions to the respondents.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected were analysed using charts, graphs and tables. Also, the null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance with two-sample t-test statistics as a tool for data analysis.

Expected Result

We expect the N-teach and N-Agro programmes to have significant positive impacts on poverty reduction and youth empowerment in Nigeria. Specifically, we expect that N-Teach and N-Agro shall significantly reduce the level of poverty in the study area by empowering the youths who are beneficiaries of these programmes with skills and finances that will enable them to create employment for themselves and others within their localities.

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The data collected from the survey were analysed, and empirical findings were presented in this section as follows:

Stylized Facts on Demographics of the Participants

This section presents all the demographics on the N-power benefits which include Age, Education qualification, types of Programme and Gender.

Stylized Facts on Participants by Age Brackets

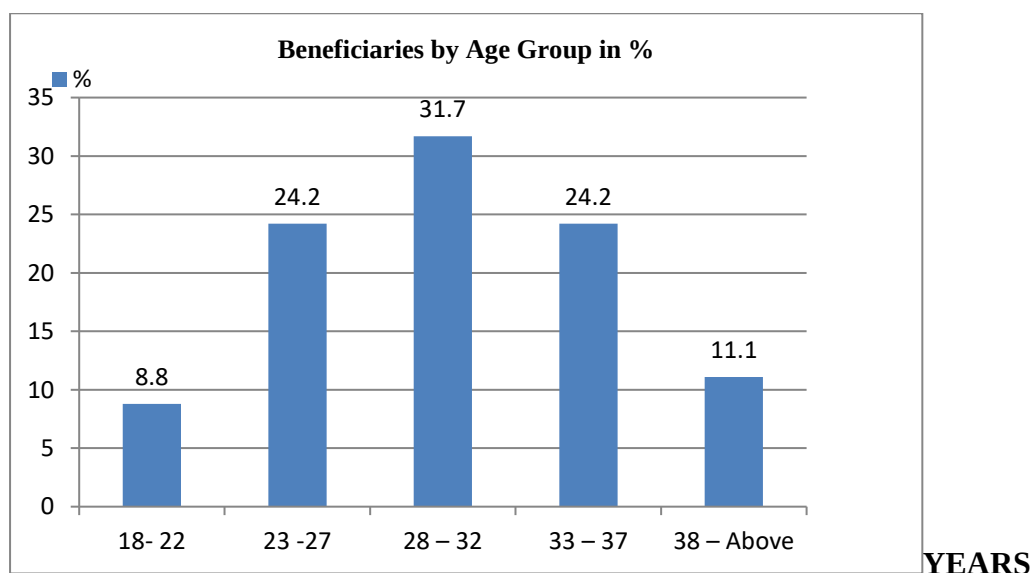


Figure 4.1.1: Trends in N-Power Beneficiaries by Age Group.

Source: Authors' computation from Survey Data.

The stylised facts in figure 4.1 revealed that beneficiaries of N-Teach and N-Agro programmes were Adults within the ages of 18 to 40 years who were supposed to be economically viable, independent and active individuals. As shown in figure 4.1, beneficiaries between the ages of 28-32 years dominated the programme in Eket Senatorial district, making up 31.7%, followed

by those within the ages of 23-27 years and 33-37 years, who made up 24.2% each of the population, and the least were those in the age bracket of 38 years and above. However, evidence before us highlighted that the majority of the beneficiaries were people in poverty and unemployed, and as such, joined the N-Power programme as a means to escape poverty.

Stylized Facts on Education Qualification by Participants

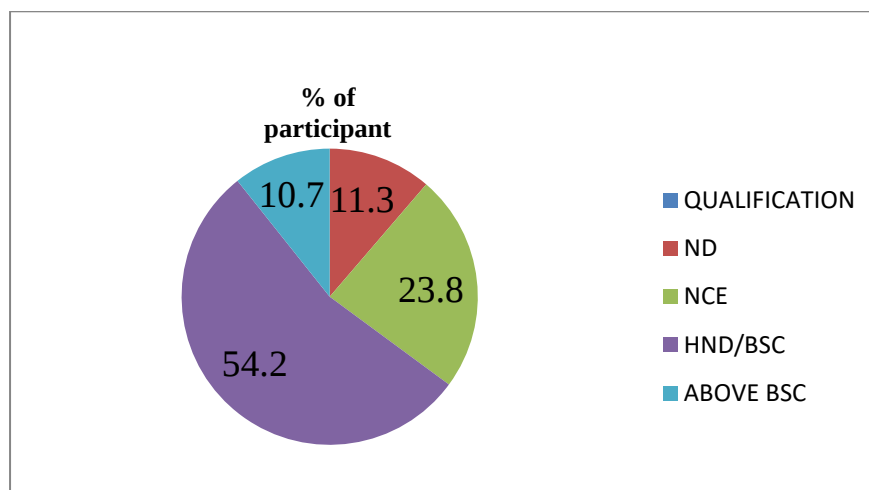


Figure 4.1.2: Education Qualification by Participants. Source: Authors Computation

The stylized facts in figure 4.1.2 highlighted the participants group and their educational qualifications. From the figure 4.1.2, it is seen that 54.2% of the beneficiaries possess at least a Higher National Diploma (HND) or Bachelor of Science (BSc) Degrees, 10.7% possess qualifications above the HND/BSc, 23.8% acquired Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) and, 11.3% Ordinary National Diploma (OND). As evidenced in their educational qualifications, the beneficiaries were already empowered in terms of education received in their various institutions of learning before the N-power. However, given their unemployment status, N-Power therefore was a mentorship programme that should provide both training and finances to either get the beneficiaries self-employed or gain employment in the nearest future. Whether the expectations from the programme were met or not shall be determined by other variables in this study.

Table 4.1: Gender of the Beneficiaries

GENDER	EKET	ONNA	IKOT ABASI	EASTERN OBOLO	ORON	MBO	TOTAL	%
MALE	42	47	40	48	49	44	270	45
FEMALE	58	53	60	52	51	56	330	55
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100	600	100

Source: Authors' Computation from survey Data

The stylized facts in Table 4.1 presented the gender of all the beneficiaries that were randomly selected for the study and their Local Governments of service. From the table, the total number of male beneficiaries selected as participants for the study was 270 which is 45% of our sample size, whereas, the total no of female participants was 330 which translates to 55% of the participants in the study. The differences in the number of male and female selected points to



the facts that the number of female beneficiaries found on their duty posts were far greater than the number of male beneficiaries.

Table 4.2: Participants by N-Power Programme Types

PROGRAM ME	EKE T	ONN A	IKOT ABA SI	EASTER N OBOLO	ORO N	MB O	TOTA L	% of participants
N-TEACH	74	82	78	87	81	88	490	81.7
N-AGRO	26	18	22	13	19	12	110	18.3
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100	600	100

Source: Authors' Computation from Survey Data

Table 4.2 revealed that the N-Teach Programme has more beneficiaries than N-Agro. As such, a total of 490 N-Teach and 110 N-Agro beneficiaries were randomly selected from the three federal constituencies that made up Eket Senatorial District for the study. The relatively higher number of N-Teach beneficiaries to N-Agro may be attributed to the Government's priorities for education. As only those with selected Agricultural background either from Polytechnic or University were posted to N-Agro, whereas the N-Teach Programme was all comers' Affair for all graduate beneficiaries.

Stylized Facts on Effects of N-Power on Poverty and Youth Empowerment Indices

This section presents the analysis and data on critical variables that explain the effects of N-Power on Poverty Reduction and Youth Empowerments in Nigeria. Therefore, to achieve objectives 1-5 of this paper, the stylised facts for all the critical variables of interest are discussed as follows:

Stylized Facts on Monthly Income (Average) by Beneficiaries Before Joining the Programme

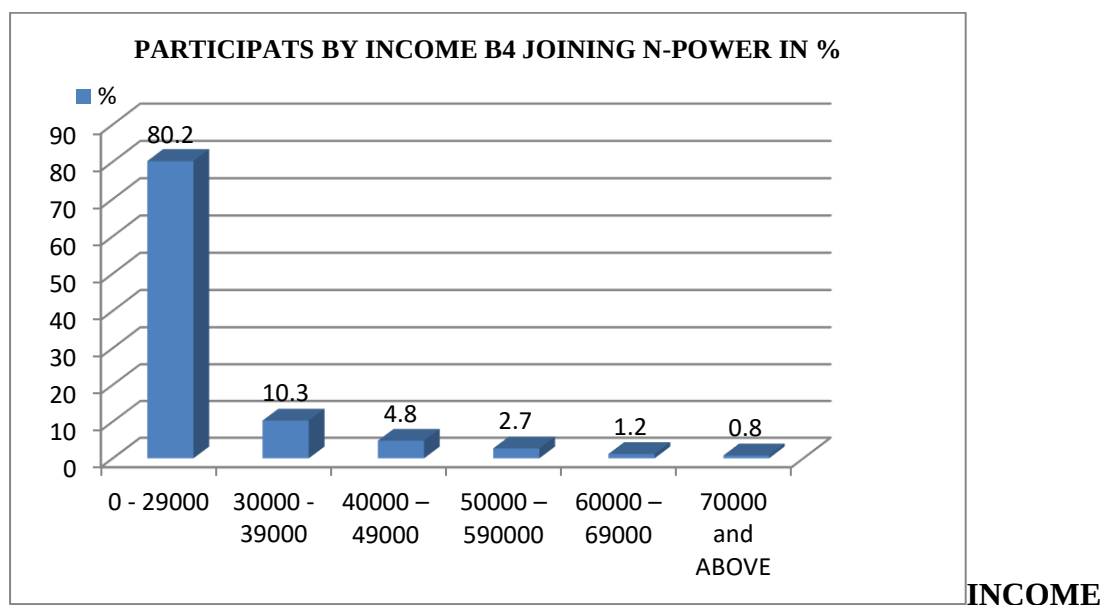


Figure 4.2.1: Stylized facts on Income before Joining N-power.

Source: Authors' Computation.



From the stylised facts in figure 4.2.1, it has been revealed that most of the participants of N-power were financially poor prior to their enrolment into the programme. The chart indicated that 80.2% of the participants earned between 0 and 29,000 Naira per month prior to joining the programme. This amount was far less than the minimum wage, even as most of them had no earned income. The low or no-income status of the beneficiaries implies that most of the beneficiaries of N-power were unemployed and totally dependent prior to their enrolments in the programme. Hence, they embraced the programme as an opportunity to improve their standard of living and to contribute meaningfully to the society.

Monthly Income (Average) by Beneficiaries While in N-Power

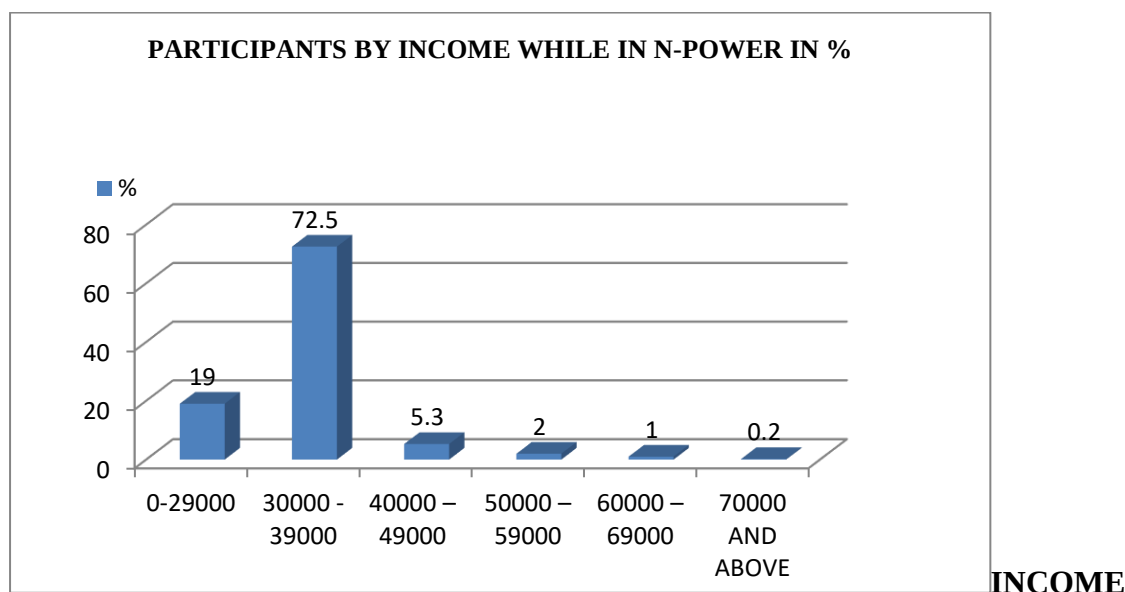


Figure 4.2.2: Stylised Facts on Monthly Income (Average) by Participants While in the Program. Source: Authors' Computation

The stylised facts in figure 4.2.2 show that taking the average of the beneficiaries' monthly income, 72.5% of the beneficiaries earned income between 30000 and 39000 Naira in the last three months prior to this study. This was in contrast to the average income they earned before the N-Power, as highlighted in figure 4.2.1. By implication, the N-power can be judged to be effective in curbing absolute poverty since most of the beneficiaries can now have income for basic subsistence. However, this judgement shall only be validated after ascertaining that the increase in income was as a result of the beneficiaries' involvements in N-power and that the income was adequate enough for their basic needs and sustained beyond the lifetime of the programme.

Stylized Facts on Average Daily Meals by Participants in the Last 3 Months

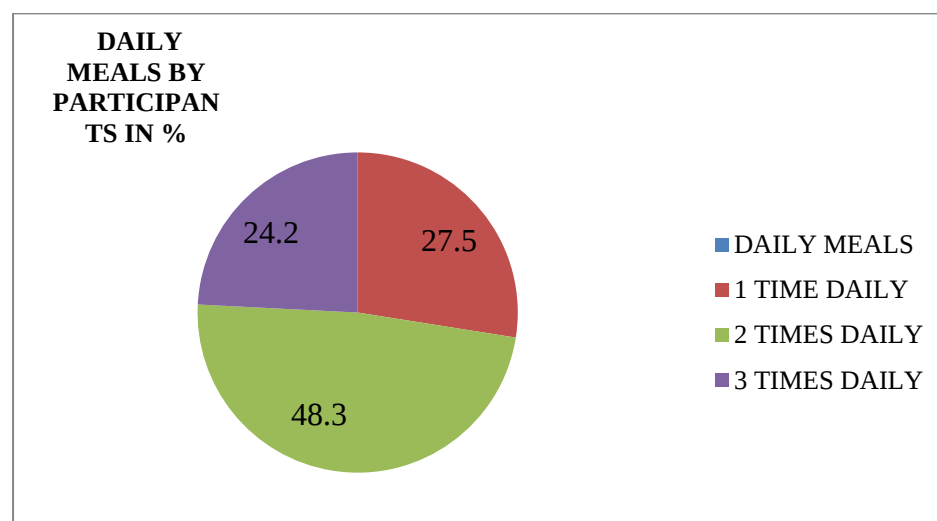


Figure 4.2.3: Stylized Facts on Average Daily Meals

Source: Authors' Computation

The stylized facts in Figure 4.2.3 presents average daily meals of the participants as a food security variable. This variable is necessary because one cannot really say to be out of poverty if one is not really able to properly feed oneself and his/her households. As shown in the diagram, only 48.3% of the beneficiaries on average were able to afford 3 square meals daily, whereas, 27.5% and 24.2% of the beneficiaries were only able to afford a single meal and 2 meals daily respectively. This implies that most of the participants in N-Power suffered some levels of food insecurity even with the income earned in N-power as recorded in Figure 4.2.2. To dig deeper into the food security challenge as a sign of poverty among the beneficiaries, information on **Household Access to Nutritional Meals are presented in** Figure 4.2.4.

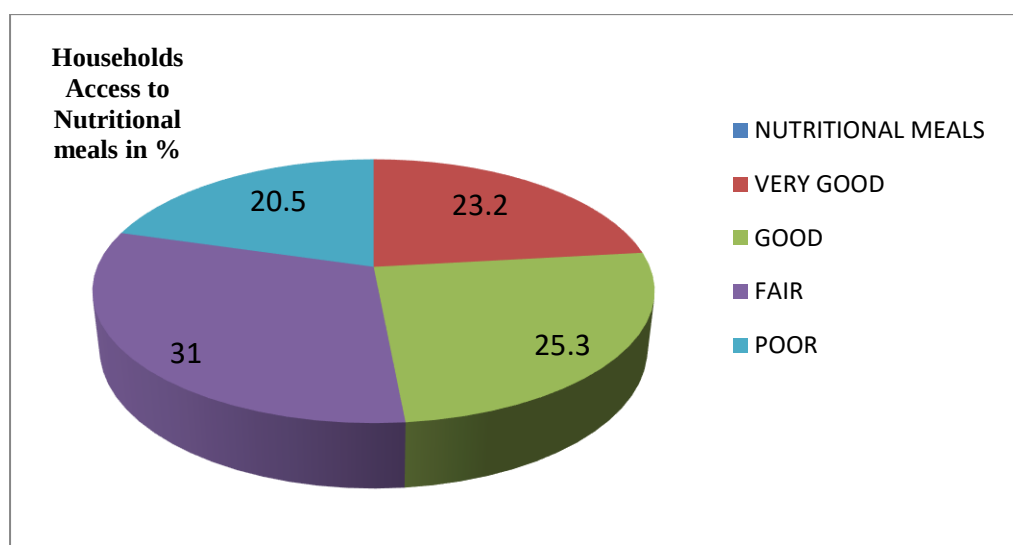


Figure 4.2.4: Stylized Facts on Households Access to Nutritional Meals. Source: Authors' Computation



Figure 4.2.4 confirms that food insecurity was severe among the beneficiaries, as 20.5% of the participants classified their nutritional intake as poor, 31% classified it as fair, 25.3% of the participants said their intake was good and only 23.2% classified their nutritional intake as very good. To ascertain why a greater percentage of the participants could not afford three square meals and their dietary intake was poor, the researchers obtained data on how adequate and consistent their stipend was, and the stylised facts of the said data are presented in **Figures 4.2.5 and 4.2.6 respectively.**

Stylized Facts on Beneficiaries Rating of How Adequate the N-Power Monthly Stipend

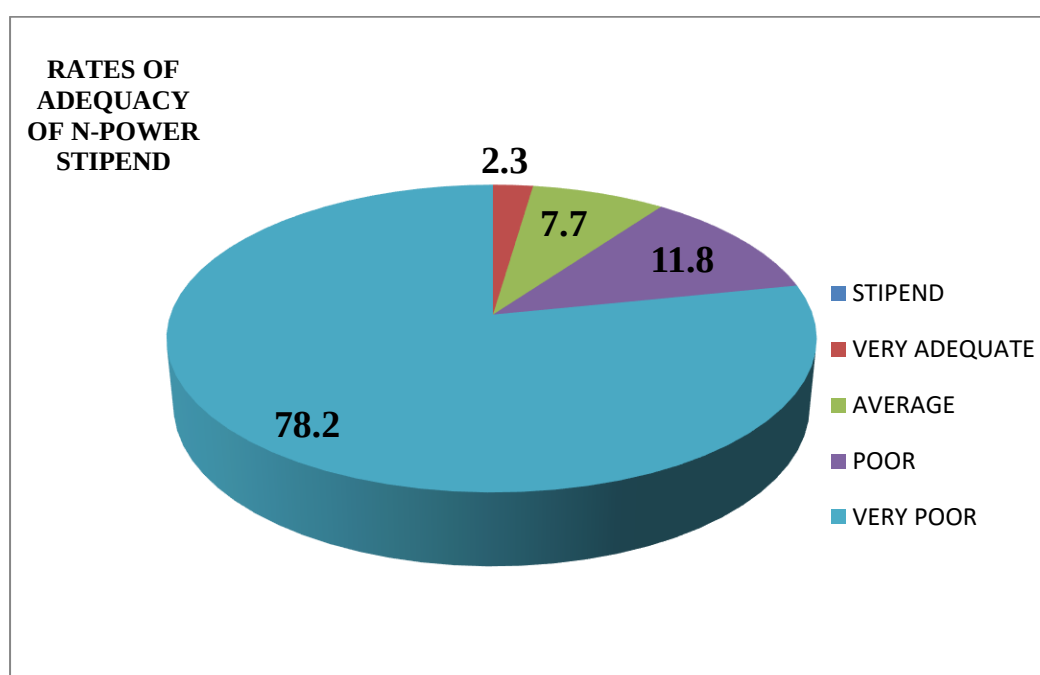


Figure 4.2.5: Stylised Facts on Beneficiaries Rating of how Adequate the N-Power Monthly Stipend Is. Source: Authors' Computation

The Stylized Facts in figure 4.2.5 revealed that the major cause of poverty among the beneficiaries of N-Power, as evidenced in their poor dietary intake and nutritional values, is poor remuneration. As described by the beneficiaries in their rating of how adequate their stipends are in terms of amount and in relation to prices of commodities in the market, 78.2% of the participants rate their stipends as very poor, 11.8% rate the stipend as poor, 7.7% rate it as average, while only 2.3 rates it as very Adequate. By implication, the stylised facts illustrated that although N-power as a programme has offered the beneficiaries a token of income as the stipend was grossly inadequate, insignificant and incapable of moving the beneficiaries out of poverty. The low income and the inability of the beneficiaries to acquire the basic goods and services necessary for survival with dignity also mean that the youths, though engaged, were not properly empowered; hence, poverty persisted.

Stylized Facts on Timely Payment of Monthly Stipend to Beneficiaries

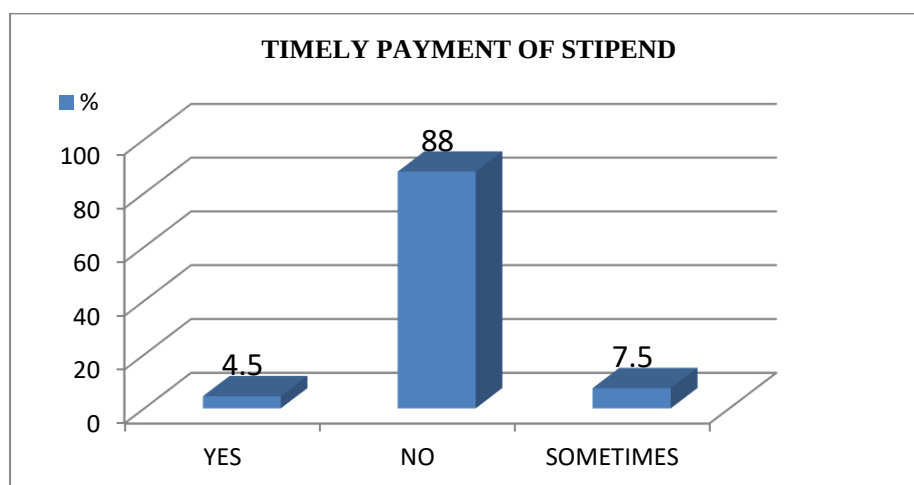


Figure 4.2.6: Stylized Facts on Timely Payment of Monthly Stipend to Beneficiaries

Beyond the N-power Stipend being inadequate, the stylized facts in Figure 4.2.6, shows that there were delays in payments as lives were miserable for the beneficiaries. Hence, 88% of the participants in the study responded with an emphatic “no” to timely payments of stipends, whereas 7.5% of the participants were somewhat diplomatic in explaining how devastated the situation was by responding with “sometimes” to timely payment of stipends. The response sometimes, however, implies that there were months in which the payments were delayed and, in such months as explained by some of the participants, the beneficiaries felt betrayed, discouraged and disappointed. Therefore, the challenges faced by participants while in the N-power programme are presented in **Table 4.3**.

Table 4.3: Challenges Faced While In the N-Power Programme and Participants

CHALLENGES	EKET	ONNA	IKOT ABASI	EASTERN OBOLO	ORON	MBO	TOTAL	%
DELAYED STIPEND PAYMENTS	92	87	95	91	94	83	542	90.3
LIMITED TRAINING SUPPORT	88	90	84	96	92	98	548	91.3
POOR WORKING CONDITION	89	83	81	83	90	85	511	85.2
LIMITED OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADVANCEMENT	61	44	58	64	55	63	345	57.5
OTHERS	24	34	30	16	18	20	142	23.7

Source: Authors' Computation from Survey



Table 4.3 revealed that out of 600 participants selected for the study, 542 participants, which is 90.3%, have suffered delayed in payments of stipends; 91.3% of the participants complained of limited training support, 85.2% of the participants complained of poor working conditions, especially in schools; 57.5% complained of limited opportunities for advancement, as some of the early beneficiaries were laid off after two years without any form of payoff or proper steps to ensure they were better employed or empowered with capital to start up their business. Also, 23.7% of the participants, in addition to the aforementioned challenges, complained of excessive workload, especially in schools that have fewer teachers; high transport costs to the place of work due to patrol subsidy removal; difficult terrain; hunger; lack of medical support, etc.

Stylized Facts on Participants and Skills Acquired while in N-power

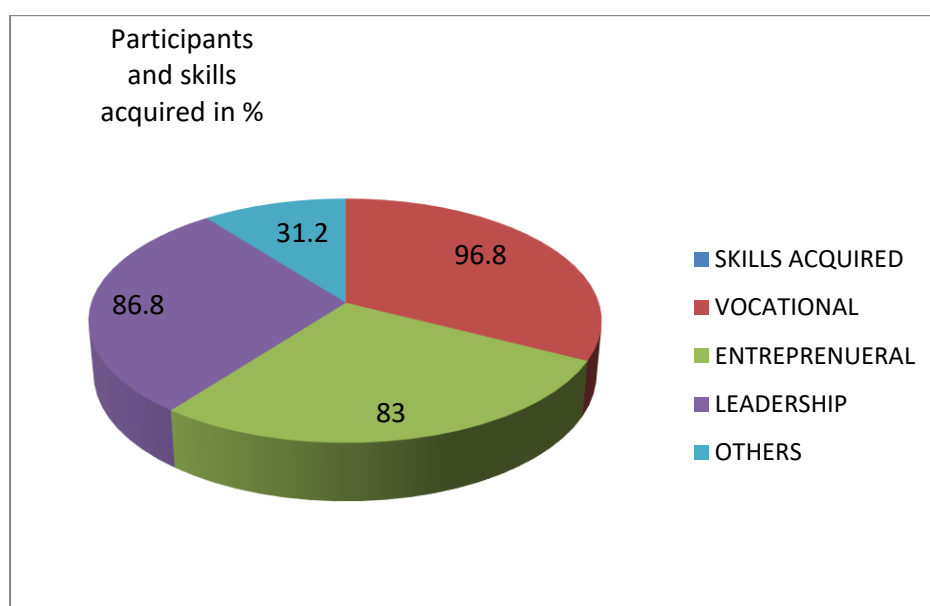


Figure 4.2.6: Stylised Facts on Participants and Skills Acquired while in N-power.

Source: Authors' Computation

The Stylized Facts in Figure 4.2.6 present the skills acquired by each of the participants while in the programme. The diagram illustrates that 96.8% of the participants acquired vocational skills, which means that through the programme, the beneficiaries have been made to possess first-hand experiences in addition to their education and certification and have been made ready for employment. Also, 83% of the participants acquired entrepreneurial skills and 86.8% acquired leadership skills. The implication of these skills acquired by the beneficiaries is that the beneficiaries, if presented with resources, can start and manage their own businesses to a successful state, employ others and contribute to lifting people out of poverty. However, it seems the government did not look beyond empowering the beneficiaries with skills through the programme, as the skills have been left to lie fallow and the beneficiaries left to cater for themselves after the two years experiences in the programme. Hence, the percentage of participants who got employed permanently and those are not are presented in **Figure 4.2.7**

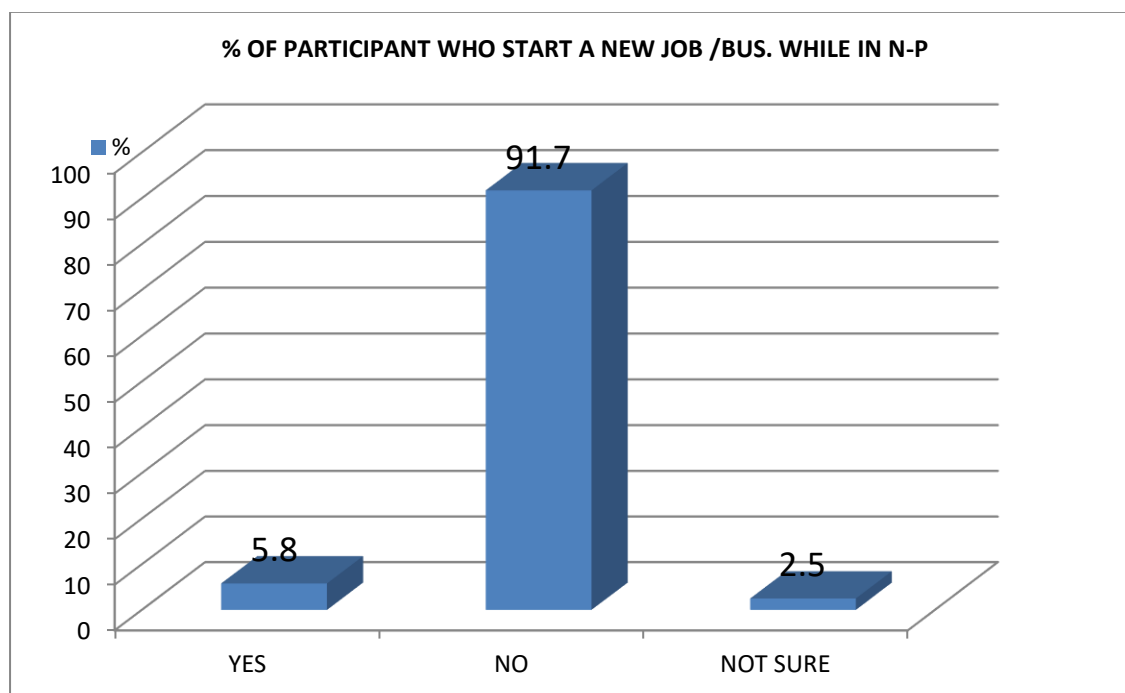


Figure 4.2.7: Participants who started Jobs/Business while in N-P and those who did not

The stylised facts in figure 4.2.7 confirmed that most of the N-power beneficiaries were unemployed after the programme as they neither got permanent employment nor started businesses for themselves. From the diagram, 2.5% of the participants were still uncertain whether their efforts can offer those jobs or businesses before the end of the programme. The uncertainty was a result of the limited support they got from stakeholders in the programme. Also, 91.7% of the participants in the study did not have any forms of business or jobs even when most of them had left the programme and others were about to leave. Hence, those who have completed the programme were returned to the labour market to compete for the very few employments available in the economy; as such, poverty and unemployment were on the increase, as N-power has little or no effect.

Testing of Hypothesis

Ho: There is no significant impact of N-Teach and N-Agro on Poverty Reduction and Youth empowerments in Nigeria

To determine the impact of N-Teach and N-Agro on Poverty Reduction and Youth empowerment in Nigeria, we test for no significant difference between Poverty rate before the N-power and Poverty rate while in the N-power programme. Income of the participants in the two periods (before N-Power and while in N-Power) was used as a proxy for poverty. This is because the focus is on a specific income group, and income as a reflection of purchasing power correctly explains the participants' or household's ability to afford basic needs. Also, a two-tailed test was adopted since the intention was to determine differences in either direction. The result of the test is presented in table 4.4

**Table 4.4: t-Test (Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances)**

	<i>Poverty before N-P</i>	<i>Poverty While in N-P</i>
Mean	100	100
Variance	35275.2	28685.2
Observations	6	6
Pooled Variance	31980.2	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
Df	10	
t Stat	0	
P(T<=t), one-tail	0.5	
t Critical one-tail	1.812461123	
P(T<=t), two-tail	1	
t Critical two-tail	2.228138852	

Source: Authors' Computation in Excel

Table 4.4 presents the results of the t-test. From the results, the p-value (the probability of t-statistics ($P(T \leq t)$ value) of 1 is greater than the significance level of 0.05 with a degree of freedom (df) of 10; hence, we accept the null hypothesis, which states that there are no significant effects of N-teach and N-Agro on poverty and youth empowerment in Nigeria. The result means that the observed data is perfectly consistent with the null hypothesis, as there is insufficient evidence to show that a significant difference exists in poverty and youth empowerment between the two periods.

DISCUSSION

The results above revealed no significant effects of N-teach and N-Agro on poverty reduction and youth empowerment in the Eket senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. From the empirical evidence, the poverty rate during N-power equals the poverty rate before N-power. The reason was that the N-power programme as a two-year mentorship programme designed to provide the beneficiaries with training and finances to either get them to be self-employed or gain employment in the near future, has failed to achieve its goal due largely to poor planning and implementation. The economic dynamics which resulted in a high inflation rate in the country made the #30,000 stipend for beneficiaries grossly inadequate for basic needs, and inconsistency/delays in the time of payment made economic survival difficult for the beneficiaries. Also, beneficiaries who had completed the two-year programme were laid off to the labour market without any form of employment or training support even as the poverty rate and unemployment in the country were on the increase.



CONCLUSION

This study employed a survey research design to examine the impacts of N-power Programme on Poverty Reduction and Youth Empowerments in Nigeria with special interest in the Eket Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State. Specifically, the trends and effects of N-teach and N-Agro programmes on poverty reduction and youth empowerment were examined. The stylised facts illustrated that although the N-power programme has offered the beneficiaries a token of income through the stipend, the income was grossly inadequate, insignificant and incapable of moving the beneficiaries out of poverty. The low income and the inability of the beneficiaries to acquire basic goods and services necessary for survival with dignity signify that the youths, although engaged, were not properly empowered; hence, poverty persisted. Therefore, the empirical evidence revealed that the p-value of 1 in a two-tailed test was greater than the significance level of 0.05 with a degree of freedom (df) of 10; as such, the null hypothesis was accepted. The paper concluded that the observed data was perfectly consistent with the null hypothesis, as there was insufficient evidence to show that a significant difference exists in poverty and youth empowerment between the periods of the N-power programme and the period before the N-power programme.

Recommendations

From the findings of this study, the following recommendations are put forward to help the Governments scale-up the N-power programmes as a means to empower the youths and reduce poverty in the country:

1. **Increase the Stipend to the New Minimum Wage and Avoid Delays in Monthly Payments of Stipend to Beneficiaries:** Some of the major challenges of the N-power programme are poor remuneration and delays in payment of Stipend. To overcome these challenges in Eket senatorial District, the federal government has to take urgent steps to increase the N-power Stipend up to the ₦80,000 minimum wage in Akwa Ibom State for beneficiaries in that State and ensure the beneficiaries receive the money as and when due. This will reduce poverty by empowering the beneficiaries to meet their basic needs, save some percentage of the stipend for life after the programme and take other steps to move away from poverty.
2. **Ensure a Transition Plan for the Beneficiaries after their Training, from the Programme to long term Employment:** Another important challenge of N-power was how the beneficiaries were laid off from the programme after two years of service without any form of employment. This makes the beneficiaries return to the labour market with limited opportunities for advancement. To overcome this challenge, we strongly recommend that: (a) Federal Government should get into Partnership with States, Local Governments and Organized Private Sector in Order to Move the Beneficiaries out of Poverty. This can be achieved by assigning a certain percentage of the beneficiaries who are specially trained to be absorbed in the workforce yearly and up to a certain period by each of the partners. (b) Establish a sovereign wealth fund contributed to by each of the partners and get the beneficiaries who are interested in entrepreneurship to present a business plan and a small percentage of the capital as a commitment to benefit from the fund.
3. Where the beneficiaries cannot be permanently employed after their N-power training, they should be encouraged to remain in the programme until they find permanent employment.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Authors are grateful for the opportunity to present findings from a research project titled The Impacts of N-Power Programmes on Poverty Reduction and Youth Empowerments in Nigeria (A Study of Eket Senatorial District, Akwa Ibom State). The Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) in Nigeria supported this project (Ref. No: TETF/DRSD/CE/AKWA-IBOM/IBR/2023/VOL.1 and TETFUND/IBR/COE/AFAHA NSIT/PR/062).

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