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**ASSESSMENT OF THE CONTRIBUTION OF N-POWER PROGRAMME TO YOUTH EMPOWERMENT IN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The purpose of the study was to assess the contribution of N-Power programme to youth empowerment in Cross River State, Nigeria. Specifically, the objectives of the study were; to determine the contribution of N-Power programme to youth empowerment in Cross River, to identify challenges facing the programme in ensuring empowerment of youth in the study area and to suggest ways of improving the N-Power programme for more effective youth empowerment in Nigeria. The study adopted cross sectional survey design while cluster random sampling was used to select beneficiaries. Questionnaires were used to collect data as Key Informant Interview was also used to compliment Questionnaire. Furthermore, the study used percentages for analysis of data. The study discovered that the beneficiaries of N-Power programme were mostly composed of N-Teach strand of the programme, followed by N-Health strand, N-Agro and Voluntary Assets and Income Declaration Scheme (VAIDS) strands respectively. The study also found that N-Power contributed to empowerment of youth through poverty reduction, proficiency skills in ICT, financial empowerment, on the job experience and investment in small scale businesses. However, there were challenges faced by the programme in empowerment of youth which included delay in payment of allowance, unpaid allowances, distance to working places and teacher training for most of N-Teach beneficiaries. The study therefore recommended for prompt and timely payment of the stipends to beneficiaries of the programme by Federal government, timely sorting of problems of unpaid allowances, posting nearest to place of residence and teacher education for N-Teach categories.*

**KEYWORDS:** N-Power, empowerment, poverty, social investment programme, unemployment.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Unemployment is one of the major developmental issues confronting developing societies such as Nigeria (Kayode, 2014). Generally, unemployment in Nigeria appears to be on consistent rise and is seen to prevail among the working population which comprised of a significant proportion of the youth who also constitute more than half of population of the country. Available data indicates that more than half of the Nigerian population is under the age of 35 years and significant proportion of this population are unemployed while sizeable number of the youth are still under-employed (Awogbenle and Iwuamadi, 2010; National Population Commission, 2013; Federal Bureau of Statistics, 2016). According to the World Bank (2016) estimates, youth unemployment rate was around 38% in Nigeria. Unemployment and disempowerment appear to be related as the two concepts also seem to be related to poverty. Thus, unemployment has posed serious threat to social and economic stability and is seemingly contributing to the high rate of poverty in the country (Kabeer 2003; ILO, 2012; Ajufo 2013; DFID, 2017).

In reaction to the endemic situation of unemployment and its perceived relationship with poverty and disempowerment, Federal Government of Nigeria initiated strategic plan for Job creation and youth empowerment in 2016 (DFID, 2017; N-Power Information guide, 2017). Generally, the framework for the programme identified four key growth sectors with potential to create mass employment opportunities. These two sectors included construction, Information Communication Technology (ICT), agribusiness and agro-allied industries wholesale and retail trade. The implementation of the framework from first quarter of 2016 appears to be built around three keys strands: N-power, Skills Acquisition and Innovation Hubs (DFID, 2017).

N-power is a National Social Investment Programme of the Federal Government aimed specifically at job creation and youth empowerment through human capital development. In essence, one of the objectives of the programme was to boost the human capital of the Nigerian labour force (N-Power Information Guide, 2017). The human capital boost appears to be in area of youth employment which was intended to be addressed through youth empowerment. Youth empowerment was to be ensured through skill acquisition and development of youth in critical sectors such as education, health and agriculture. The core objective of the programme seem to hinge on skills acquisition and development of the Nigerian youth, both educated and non-educated, who had minimal hope of securing jobs, even at the minimum level needed to survive or raise a family (Okoro and Bassey, 2018; N-Power Information Guide 2017). In addition, the programme was designed to fill the unemployment gaps in the teaching profession in primary schools and to assist in taking basic education to children in remote areas, especially the marginalized communities. Furthermore, the programme was also created to provide manpower to primary health care centers in communities that appear to be under staffed while also providing manpower in the area of agricultural business (Okoro and Bassey, 2018).

Few studies have been conducted to assess the impact of the programme on youth empowerment. A Study by Abin (2018) focused on N-Power Programme Implementation Process and contribution of the programme to socio-economic wellbeing of beneficiaries in Akwanga Metropolis of Nasarawa State. The study found that N-Power contributed to financial, material, social well-being of beneficiaries. The study however ignored the study area, which becomes one of the gaps the study intends to fill. A study conducted by Okoro and Bassey (2018) also investigated N-Power teachers competence and resource utilization: implication for effective and efficient teaching in Nigerian primary and post primary schools. The study was only focused on N-Teach aspect of the programme and hinged on competence of the beneficiaries in terms of teacher education. This study also ignored contribution of the programme to youth empowerment which is another vacuum the study aims to close.

### **Problem Statement/Justification**

Poverty is a serious challenge that stares any serious nation in the eye and this mostly stems from the lack of proper utilization of the teaming population of younger manpower. This truism prompted the Federal Government of Nigeria to develop and implement a social investment scheme captioned “N-Power” with the following goals:

1. To intervene and directly improve the livelihood of a critical mass of young unemployed Nigerians.
2. To develop a qualitative system of the transfer of employability, entrepreneurial and technical skills.

3. To create an ecosystem of solutions for ailing public services and government diversification policies.
4. To develop and enhance Nigeria's knowledge economy (N-Power Information guide, 2017).

The Federal Government's aggressive investment in youth development also targets some of the perennial inadequacies in public services- low teacher to pupil ratio in public primary schools; high rate of preventable diseases; lack of science and knowledge to bolster production; and a lack of enough taxable persons within the tax net. In introducing N-Power, the Federal Government provides a structure not only for large scale and relevant work skills acquisition and development, but also utilising a large volunteer workforce to fix some of the problems in public services and stimulating the larger economy. In 2016, through the N-Power, the Federal Government engaged and deployed 200,000 young Nigerians in public primary schools, primary healthcare centres in all the Local Government Areas in Nigeria (N-Power Information Guide, 2017). This has been the largest post-tertiary engagement of human resources in Africa. In 2017, the N-Power volunteer corps enlisted 300,000 volunteers bringing the number to about 500,000 N-Power Volunteers.

This programme just like any other programme has not come without its challenges. This study seeks to unravel the problems facing the smooth running of the scheme and proffering solutions through viable recommendations on the way forward for the government. Since the government looks at issues on a large scale, the researcher seeks to focus on a smaller scale in order to actually point out issues that may not be obvious when the programme is assessed holistically.

Though recently introduced, but ongoing for years now since the inception of the Buhari led administration in 2015 till date, there is lack of independent empirical data to show the efficacy of the scheme in addressing the issues it sought out to achieve. At most Abin (2018) only investigated the implementation process in his study carried in Akwanga Metropolis of Nasarawa State, Nigeria. More so, there have been serious claims on the part of government about the success of the scheme and media praises has rocked the airwaves, all without substantive investigative evidence backed by research. We cannot substantiate these claims without subjecting them to empirical research/investigation to assess to what extent the programme has achieved its aims and objectives. This study is therefore designed to bridge the knowledge gap by generating data that will support policy reforms and redirect the Federal Government on further training programmes as well as improve the welfare of participants.

The justification of this research is to unravel the implication and the difficulties experienced as a result of the introduction of N-Power programme in Nigeria and to proffer lasting solution to some of the problems. The paper equally seeks to access the extent to which the goals of the programme are being met. This is to guide the Federal Government on ways of improving the scheme to meet its desired goals in order to enhance effective implementation of the scheme

### **Objective of the Study**

The major objective of this study is to carry out a baseline survey to assess the contribution of N-Power programme to youth empowerment in Cross River State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study will:

- a. assess the contribution of N-Power programme to youth empowerment in Cross River state, Nigeria.
- b. identify challenges facing the programme in ensuring the empowerment of youth in the study area

- c. suggest ways of improving the N-Power programme for more effective youth empowerment in Cross River State, Nigeria

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **N-Power Programme**

N-Power is a job creation and empowerment programme of the National Social Investment Programme of the Federal Government of Nigeria. The N-Power programme has been designed for young Nigerians between the ages of 18 and 35. It is a paid volunteering programme of two year duration. In the specifications of the programme, graduates are required to undertake their primary tasks in identified public services within their proximate communities. All N-Power beneficiaries were entitled to computer devices that contained information necessary for their specific engagement, as well as information for their continuous training and development (N-Power Information Guide, 2017).

The programme is divided into the following categories;

- a. Graduate Category which comprised of N-Power Volunteer Corps
- b. Non-Graduate Category comprising of N-Power Knowledge and N-Power Build.

### **2.2 Goals of the programme**

- a. To intervene and directly improve the livelihood of a critical mass of young unemployed Nigerians.
- b. To develop a qualitative system for the transfer of employability, entrepreneurial and technical skills.
- c. To create an ecosystem of solutions for ailing public services and government diversification policies.
- d. To develop and enhance Nigeria's knowledge economy.

### **Key Areas of N-Power**

According to the N-Power Information Guide (2017), volunteers are expected to provide teaching, instructional, and advisory solutions in four (4) key areas.

#### ***N-Power Teach***

This category of beneficiaries are expected to help improve basic education delivery in Nigeria. N-Power Teach Volunteers are deployed as teacher assistants in primary schools that appear to be understaffed in Nigeria. They are not expected to replace the current teachers, but to work as support teachers across the country, assisting with teaching, school management and other functions within the schools. Where possible, they are also required to assist in taking basic education to children in marginalized communities (N-Power Information Guide, 2017). N-Power Teach (STEM) is also a component of the N-Power Teach programme. Through this programme, young graduates with the skills and interest in computer programming and other related fields are required to assist in the implementation of the Federal Government's STEM Programme for primary and secondary schools in the country (N-Power Information guide, 2017).

#### ***N-Power Health***

Under this strand of the programme, N-Power Health beneficiaries are required to assist in improving and promoting preventive healthcare in their communities to vulnerable members of the society including pregnant women and children and to families and individuals. This area is

reserved for those who read health and medical related courses at certificate course and diploma levels (N-Power Information Guide, 2017).

### ***N-Power Agro***

N-Power Agro beneficiaries are intended to provide advisory services to farmers across the country. They are expected to disseminate the knowledge that has been amassed by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development in the area of extension services. They are also required to gather data of Nigeria's agriculture assets. This area is meant for youth who were educated in agricultural related courses (N-Power Information Guide, 2017).

### ***The Voluntary Asset and Income Declaration Scheme (VAIDS)***

VAIDS seeks to encourage non-compliant and partially compliant taxpayers to voluntarily declare their correct income and assets and pay the appropriate tax due to the government. The N-Power VAIDS volunteers are expected to function as community tax liaison officers and have the following key responsibilities which included tax promotion, document review, record keeping, answering online inquiries, customer management, report writing, amongst others. This key area engaged youth with post tertiary qualification in computer and information science related courses (N-Power Information guide, 2017).

### **Concept of Youth**

The concept of youth has been defined by many authors and international organizations. However, there is no universally accepted definition of the youth. The notion youth, varies as much as there are scholars, writes, cultures and societies. For instance, The United Nations (2005) defines youth as all individuals aged between 15 and 24. The World Bank (2007) expands the definition of youth to include all young people aged between 12 and 24. Torimiro et al., (1999), on their part described youth as a group of young people between the ages of 13 to 30. Also, the Nigeria Second National Youth Policy (2009) describes the youth as all young males and females aged between 18 and 35 years, who are citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

The above definitions of youth are primarily anchored on the parameter of age bracket. Yet being a youth may mean more than just age bracket. Youth do not just constitute the age cluster but the inherent characteristic sought after in the youth and which can be universally agreed upon is their potential energies and innovativeness. These notable features may be lacking in either childhood or adulthood. Perez-Morales (1996) noted that no matter what the age range of years of the youth may be, the point is that anytime we talk and think about youth, it implies a group of young people in a society who have a lot of energy, new ideas and new ways to see life and face problems.

One thing is clear, the boundaries defining the transition from childhood to youth and from youth to adulthood is not clear. Therefore, defining youth globally according to some exact age range can be a very difficult task. The age range often used by the United Nations and others are simply for statistical purposes. Apart from the statistical definition of the term "youth", the meaning of the term "youth" have continued to change in response to fluctuating political, economic and socio-cultural circumstances. For the purpose of the study definition of youth by National Youth Policy (2009) is adopted since Federal Government appears to have used the definition as a guide to determining beneficiaries of the programme.

### **Concept of Empowerment**

There are no universally accepted definitions of empowerment in the literature. In some of these definitions empowerment is seen as a goal, and in some as a means (Per-Anders, 2008; Gibson, 1991). Per-Anders (2008) defined empowerment as an increase in the person's control over the determinants of their quality of life, through (necessarily) an increase in either health (e.g., through self-confidence, self-esteem, self-efficacy, autonomy), or knowledge (self-knowledge, consciousness raising, skills development, competence), or freedom (negative or positive).

To Kabeer (2003) empowerment refers to the ability to make choices. To be disempowered means to be denied choice, while empowerment refers to the processes by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such ability.

Kabeer (2003) however noted that, certain conditions are necessary for choice to happen:

- a. Alternatives must exist. This entails the ability to have different choices. As such Poverty and disempowerment generally go hand in hand, because they limit people's ability to meet their basic needs, hence dependence on others which rules out the capacity for meaningful choice.
- b. Alternatives must not only exist, they must also be seen to exist. Power relations are most effective when they are not perceived as such. These forms of behaviour could be said to reflect 'choice', but are really based on the denial of choice.

Kabeer (2003) adds that the concept of empowerment can be explored through three closely interrelated dimensions: agency, resources, and achievements. Agency represents the processes by which choices are made and put into effect. It is hence central to the concept of empowerment. Resources are the medium through which agency is exercised; and achievements refer to the outcomes of agency. Each of these dimensions is interrelated. For the purpose of the study, Per-Anders (2008) definition is adopted.

### **Contribution of N-Power on Socio-economic Development of Youth in Nigeria**

Few studies have investigated the contribution of N-Power programme to youth empowerment in Nigeria. A study by Abin (2018) examined the impact of N-Power Programme on socio-economic lives of beneficiaries in Akwanga Metropolis of Nasarawa state. The study showed that the programme improved socio-economic lives of the beneficiaries by contributing immensely to their financial, material, social well-being. The study also indicated overwhelming satisfaction with the programme by the beneficiaries. It can be deduced that since empowerment entails ability to make choices and have control over one's life, the programme could be seen to have impacted on youth empowerment. This is because in Nigeria, financial independence seem to give people considerable ability to make choices and also control on their lives.

### **Challenges of N-Power Programme in Ensuring Youth Empowerment in Nigeria**

Challenges of N-Power programme in ensuring youth empowerment in Nigeria have been identified by few studies. A study conducted by Abin (2018) revealed that some of the problems faced by the programme included unpaid and late payment of stipend to volunteers. Other challenge noted was the over centralization of the programme. This has the tendency to affect interaction between beneficiaries and authorities who control the programme and limit possibility of improving the scheme through understanding plights of beneficiaries. A study by Okoro and Bassey (2018) noted that the programme did not provide teacher education to volunteers before deployment in the N-Teach strand. This implies that such volunteers were not empowered to take up the teaching profession by the programme before deploying them.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

The design for the study is a cross sectional survey design. This design is adopted because it has the advantage of allowing the researchers to gather information from large samples to represent all elements in the study area while also being compatible with statistical analysis.

### **Study Area**

Cross River State is a coastal state in south eastern Nigeria, located in the Niger Delta, bordering Cameroon to the east. It is named for the Cross River (Oyono), which passes through the state. The State occupies about 20,156 square kilometers with population of 3,737,517 (NPC 2016 estimates). It shares boundaries with Benue State to the north, Enugu and Abia States to the west, to the east by Cameroon Republic and to the south by Akwa-Ibom and the Atlantic Ocean (Niger Delta Budget Monitoring Group, 2009; Nwabueze 1982). Its capital is Calabar and a port city in southern Nigeria. The original name of the city is Akwa Akpa. The city is located on a hill adjacent to the Calabar and Great Kwa rivers and creeks of the delta inland. The city is seen as the tourism capital of Nigeria and administratively divided into Calabar Municipal and Calabar south Local Government Areas. Significant land marks in the city include international museum, Free Trade Zone Area Port, International Airport and seaport and University of Calabar (Odey, 2018).

Its major towns are Akamkpa, Biase, Calabar South, Ikom, Igede, Obubra, Odukpani, Ogoja, Ugep, Obudu, Obanliku, Akpabuyo, Ofutop, Iso-bendghe, Danare, Boki, Yala, Bendeghe Ekiem, Etomi, and Ukelle. The State is composed of several ethnic groups, which include the Efik, the Ejagham, Yakurr, Bette, Yala, Igede, Ukelle and the Bekwarra. The Efik language is widely spoken in the southern part of Cross River State, especially in Calabar Municipality, Calabar South and Odukpani while Ejagham language is the most widely spoken language in Cross River State (Odey, 2018).

There are also the Yakurr, Agoi and Bahumono ethnic groups in Yakurr and Abi Local Government Areas (LGAs), while the Mbembe are predominantly found in Obubra LGA. In the northern-most part of the state are several sub- dialect groups, which includes Etung, Olulumo, Ofutop, Nkim/Nkum, Abanajum, Nseke and Boki in both Ikom, Etung and Boki LGAs. Furthermore, the Yala/Yache, Igede, Ukelle, Ekajuk, Mbube, Bette, Bekwarra and Utugwanga people are found in Ogoja, Yala, Obudu and Obanliku Local Government Areas (Odey, 2018).

### **Population of the study**

Population of the study encompasses all beneficiaries of N-Power programme in Cross River State, Nigeria with beam light on Calabar its capital city. This includes all males and females from 18 to 35 years who are beneficiaries of N-Power programme in Cross River State, Nigeria.

### **Sampling Technique and Procedure**

Cluster random sampling technique was used in selection of 167 samples for the study. These were drawn from N-Teach, N-Agro and N-Health strands of the programme. In the selection process, the researchers went to Places of primary assignments (PPAs) of beneficiaries in Calabar Metropolis. Through rapport with the Staff in these places, the researchers were able to meet and gather the beneficiaries. The purpose of the study was explained to them and their indulgence to be part of the study solicited. Afterwards, the beneficiaries who were present at the locations were included in the study. Also, four (4) staff of the National Social Investment Programme in Calabar and four (4)

beneficiaries each of the categories of the programme were also purposefully selected in their offices.

### Method of Data Collection

Data for the study was collected through Questionnaire and Key Informant Interview. In the process of data collection, the researchers engaged research assistants and trained them on how to distribute questionnaires. After the training, researchers and their research assistants moved to places of primary assignment of the beneficiaries and administered the questionnaires on them face to face. Respondents were given a minimum of one (1) day for completion of the questionnaires. After the expiry of the time, the questions were collated for analysis. For Key Informant Interview, data was collected as the Key informants were visited in their offices.

### Method of Data Analysis

Analysis of data involved the use of descriptive statistics and analytical tables. Thus percentages were used to determine frequency of opinion of the respondents. For Key Informant Interview, data analysis was done by means of transcribing responses of key informants.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Data of Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
(a) Age (Years)		
18-20	14	8.4
21-23	22	13.2
24-26	17	10.2
27-29	41	24.6
30-32	33	19.8
33-35	40	23.9
Total	167	100
(b) Sex		
Male	98	58.7
Female	69	42.3
Total	167	100
(c) Marital Status		
Single	101	60.1
Married	56	33.5
Divorced	9	5.4
Widowed	1	0.6
Total	167	100
(e) Educational background		
NABTEB	11	6.6
JCHEW	7	4.2
SCHEW	5	2.9
Diploma	29	17.4
NCE	35	20.9
Degree	79	47.3
Total	167	100

Source: Field Survey, 2019



Table 1 presents socio-demographic characteristics of N-power beneficiaries in the study. In relation to age distribution, the Table indicated that most, 41 (24.6%), of the beneficiaries were in the age range of 27-29 while 14 (8.4%) had the least percentage. Furthermore, those between age range of 30-35 were 40 (23.9%) had second highest percentage, beneficiaries aged between 30-32 years came third with 33 (19.8%) while in the fourth position were respondents between ages of 21-23 with 22 (13.2%). This data implies that most of the N-Power beneficiaries may have attained at least post-secondary education from ages of 27-29 years. Overall, beneficiaries from ages of 27-35 dominated the list of respondents. The implication is that the programme have engaged most of the youth on the ages where they need to be empowered for improvement in their living standard and human capital development.

For sex distribution, the Table indicated that majority, 98 (58.7%), of the beneficiaries were male while 69 (42.3%) of them were females, representing minority in the study. The fact that male beneficiaries dominated the composition of the respondents shows that males are more actively involved in labour force than women.

In relation to marital status, it was revealed that majority, 101 (60.1%), of the beneficiaries were singles while there was just 1 (0.6%) of them who were widowed with least percentage. Furthermore, 53 (33.5%) of the beneficiaries were married representing second highest percentage while 9 (5.4%) respondents were widows, occupying the fourth position. The data reveal singles with highest percentage of migrants. It can be deduced from the data that unemployment may be one of the reasons why most of the youth are not married. Most youth seem to be scared of marriage probably because they cannot take charge of family responsibilities.

In regards to the educational background, the table indicated that most, 79 (47.3%) of the beneficiaries had bachelors degree while those Senior Community Health and Environmental Works (SCHEW) education were the least with 5 (2.9%). In the second position were beneficiaries with National Certificate of Education (NCE) with 35 (20.9%). Beneficiaries who acquired Diplomas were 29 (7.4%) were in third position. Furthermore, 11 (6.6%) of the respondents had National Business and technical Examination Board (NABTEB) education in occupying fourth position while those with Junior Community Health and Environmental Works (JCHEW) education.

Table 2: Distribution of N-Power Beneficiaries by Category of Programme Benefited in Cross River state, Nigeria

Factors	Frequency	Percentage
N-Teach	112	67.1
N-Agro	16	9.6
N-Health	27	16.2
N-Power VAIDS	12	7.2
Total	167	100

Source: Field Survey, 2019.

Table 2 presents the distribution of beneficiaries of N-Power programme by category of the programme. The table revealed that most, 112 (67.1%) of the beneficiaries were in the N-Teach strand of the programme while 12 (7.2%) of the beneficiaries who were in the Voluntary Assets and Income Declaration Scheme (VAIDS) had the least percentage. Furthermore, 27 (16.2%) were involved in N-Health strand with second highest percentage. This was followed by 16 (9.6%) of the beneficiaries who participated in N-Agro with third position. The dominance of N-Teach in the

study may not be a coincidence. It appears that the number of N-Teach beneficiaries engaged is generally greater than other strands of the programme.

In an Interview with a Key Informant, the following was noted:

*“This scheme was initiated to engage youth in various sectors that are most to the Nigerian society; education, health and agriculture... however the educational sector especially primary schools seem to be in dire need of manpower... most primary schools are marginalized in the area of teaching staff as some of the school have just one teaching staff for whole arm of the school. Often you find a situation where there are only six teachers or less in a primary school... thus, N-Power scheme intended to solve this problem by posting the volunteers to primary schools... apart from this most of the applications appeared to be in N-teach category...”* (Interview with Key Informant at National Social Investment Programme Office in Calabar, 2019)

The above finding seem to justify the engagement of more N-Teach beneficiaries in the programme since the need for teaching staff in primary schools is cogent coupled with significant proportion of youth who applied in the N-Teach category. The above finding seems to agree with Okoro and Bassey (2018) who appreciated *“the attempt by the Federal government of Nigeria through the N-Power scheme to fill the vacuum and improve basic education delivery in Nigeria...”*

Table 3: Contribution of N-Power to Empowerment of Beneficiaries in Cross River state, Nigeria

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Reduce poverty	72	43.1
Improve working experience	27	16.2
Financial independence	45	26.9
ICT proficiency	10	5.9
Business set up	13	7.8
Total	167	100

Source: Field survey, 2019

Table 3 presented the contribution of N-Power to empowerment of beneficiaries in the study area. Out of the 167 beneficiaries, 72 (43.1%) indicated that the programme empowered them through poverty reduction, constituting majority of the respondents while 10 (5.9%) who felt the programme has increased their proficiency in ICT were the least. Furthermore, 45 (26.9%) of the beneficiaries perceived that the programme ensured their financial independence, 27 (16.2%) listed working experience as one of the contributions of the programme to youth empowerment and 13 (7.8%) of them felt the programme has helped them to set up businesses.

During an interview, one of the Key Informants said:

*“Our office often encourages beneficiaries to invest their stipend in small scale businesses and not to spend all the money on consumption... last year we organized a seminar to educate the beneficiaries on how to effectively utilize their stipends... our goal is to empower them socially and economically...”* (Interview with Key Informant at National Social Investment Programme Office in Calabar, 2019).

Another key Informant argued;

*“...this programme has helped me a lot... in fact we cannot remember a programme by any administration in Nigeria that has truly helped hundreds of thousands of youth and is not biased in its recruitment process... the programme has encouraged us to stand on our own financially while also given us the experience we need to succeed in the labour market... some of the beneficiaries have started business with the money they get from the programme... this has truly contributed to reducing poverty...”* (Interview with Key Informant who is a beneficiary of the programme in Calabar, 2019).

It can be deduced that the N-Power programme has made positive impact to youth empowerment in the study area since empowerment could be seen in the light of poverty reduction, financial independence and ability to control one's destiny through increase in knowledge or skills. The above findings seem to corroborate a study by Abin (2018) who examined the impact of N-Power Programme on socio-economic lives of beneficiaries in Akwanga Metropolis of Nasarawa state. The study found that N-Power programme contributed immensely to improving socio-economic lives of the beneficiaries financially, materially and socially.

Table 4: Challenges of N-Power in Empowerment of Youth in Cross River state, Nigeria

Challenges	Frequency	Percentage
Delayed payment	107	64.1
Unpaid allowance	14	8.4
Distance to working place	28	16.8
Lack of teacher training	18	10.8
Total	167	100

Source: Field survey, 2019

Table 4 presented challenges of N-Power in empowerment of youth in Calabar. Data in the table indicated that most, 107 (64.1%), of the beneficiaries identified delay in payment of allowance while 14 (8.4%) who listed unpaid allowance were the fewest. Furthermore, 28 (26.8%) cited distance to working places as one of the issues with the programme and 18 (10.8%) indicated lack of teacher training for most of N-Teach beneficiaries.

A key Informant also noted:

*“...the only issue with the programme is the delay in payment of our stipend... sometimes we don't get paid till the beginning of the next month... when we have idea of exact time we'll collect our stipend, it can help us to plan better...”* (Interview with Key Informant who is a beneficiary of the programme in Calabar, 2019).

Another Key Informant also argued:

*“...Some beneficiaries had issues with their bank account details... others issues were administrative in nature... so stipends of those affected were not paid... We are however resolving these issues and their monies are being paid accordingly...”* (Interview with Key Informant at National Social Investment Programme Office in Calabar, 2019)

Some of these problems are similar to the ones found by Abin (2018) study which revealed that some of the problems faced by the programme included unpaid and late payment of stipend to

volunteers. A study by Okoro and Bassey (2018) also found that the programme did not empower beneficiaries with teacher education before deployment to teach.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the study concludes as follows: Beneficiaries of N-Power programme in the study area composed of N-Teach strand of the programme, Voluntary Assets and Income Declaration Scheme (VAIDS), N-Health strand and N-Agro. However number of N-Teach beneficiaries was greater than other strands of the programme. The contribution of N-Power to empowerment of youth in the study area included poverty reduction, proficiency in ICT, financial independence, working experience and set up small scale businesses. The challenges of N-Power in empowerment of youth in Cross River State are delay in payment of allowance, unpaid allowances, distance to working places and teacher training for most of N-Teach beneficiaries who are not trained in teaching methodology..

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusion drawn from the study, the following recommendations are hereby made:

- a. Federal Government should ensure prompt and timely payment of the stipends to beneficiaries of the programme.
- b. National Social Investment Programme should ensure that beneficiaries who have issues that affect payment of their allowances are timely and judiciously treated to solve problems of unpaid allowances.
- c. Postings should be determined by beneficiary's proximity to place of primary assignment. This is to avoid issue of the beneficiaries spending most of their stipends on transport in order to save money for other meaningful ventures.
- d. Federal government should ensure that beneficiaries posted to primary schools to teach are given teacher education so as to ensure more effective performance of their assignments bearing in mind that they lack teaching methodology.

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