

**N-POWER SCHEME AND YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN NIGERIA: AN ANALYSIS OF
MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS AND GOVERNMENT POLICY INCONSISTENCY**

Mbamalu, Kingsley Uchenna

Department of Public Administration,
Faculty of Management Sciences, Nnamdi Azikiwe University
Email: ku.mbamalu@unizik.edu.ng
Kingsleymbamalu2005@gmail.com

&

Prof. Ewuim, Ngozi Christiana

Department of Public Administration
Faculty of Management Sciences, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.
E-mail: n.ewuim@unizik.edu.ng

Abstract

The study tends to determine the extent with which management problems and government policy inconsistency have affected the implementation of the N-power scheme on youth unemployment reduction in Nigeria. To achieve this, a survey research method was adopted and self-constructed questionnaire which was validated by research experts was distributed to respondents. A structured questionnaire instrument was administered to the respondents and the data obtained were presented using tables and mean scores and analyzed using Pearson correlation. The study discovered that management problems have affected the N-power scheme on youth unemployment reduction in Nigeria. The study has proved that lack of strategic planning poses a problem to the N-power scheme on youth unemployment. To forestall government problem and policy inconsistency, the study recommended that policy formulators should remove all factors that have contributed in the enthrone policy inconsistency.

Keywords: N-Power Scheme, Youth Unemployment, Management Problem and Government Policy Inconsistency.

INTRODUCTION

One of the greatest challenges facing the Nigerian economy is youth unemployment. Every year, thousands of young people graduate from various tertiary institutions of learning, for which there are no jobs available for them. Even those who take to self-employment are confronted with the challenges of a harsh business climate.

Statistics from the Federal Manpower Board and the National Bureau of Statistics for July 2020 indicated that the Nigerian youth population is 108,876,800 million, representing 51 percent of the total population of the country. Out of the 108 million Nigerian youth, 86 million – representing 79.6 percent of the youth population - are unemployed, while 2.15 million - representing 1.99 percent of the youth population - are under-employed. The National Bureau of Statistics (2017) also states that there were four million job losses in Nigeria between 2016 and 2017; about 3.3 million job losses between December 2017 and September 2018, and an accumulation of over seven million job losses from 2015 to date. According to Doreo (2013) unemployment rate in Nigeria is growing at the rate of 16 percent per year with the youth impacted the most and accounting for three times the general unemployment.

Unemployment or joblessness as defined by the International Labour Organisation (2012) occurs when people are without jobs and they have sought work within the past five weeks. The unemployment rate is a measure of the prevalence of unemployment and it is calculated as a percentage by dividing the number of unemployed individuals by all individuals currently in the labour force. Official figures from the National Bureau of Statistics (2016), puts the figure of unemployed at 19.7 percent, about 30 million. The above situation has negative implications for national development.

It is important to stress at this juncture that the dimension to our discussion of development in this study will be the human angle to development. Some development analysts and economists have often overlooked this angle. People are the real wealth of nations. The basic goal of development is to create an environment that enables people to enjoy a long, healthy, creative life. This fundamental truth is often forgotten in the immediate concern with the accumulation of goods and money. Preoccupation with economic growth and the creation of wealth and material opulence has obscured the fact that development is ultimately about people. It has also had the unfortunate effect of pushing people from the center to the periphery of development debates and dialogues.

For Nigeria to overcome the challenges of underdevelopment, the human element therein must be developed to stand the test of time. This realization is not lost on the government as there have been various steps taken in the past to curb the menace of rising unemployment. Tackling unemployment has remained pivotal to every government in Nigeria over the last three decades. The establishment of the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P), the Graduate Internship Scheme (GIS), etc. are all testimonies to the fact that the issue of unemployment has continued to be at the front burner of our national discourse.

It is this realization that made the Muhammadu Buhari administration, since assumption of office in 2015 make job creation a cardinal focus of his administration. One of his many interventions as it regards job creation is the setting up of the N-power social investment scheme. The main aim of the scheme is to provide teaching, instructional and advisory solutions in four key areas namely agriculture, health, technology, and education (Obadan, 2017). The N-power Agro component was meant

to engage volunteers who will serve as experts that will provide advisory plus research based extension services to farmers. The N-power Agro volunteers function as facilitators and communicators, helping farmers to ensure that adequate knowledge is implemented to achieve the best results that will propel greater efficiency and effectiveness in agricultural production.

Through the N-power health programme, young graduates who form part of the 500,000 volunteer corps members are trained to work as public health assistants. They teach preventive health to community members including pregnant women, children, individuals, and families. They are also trained to provide basic diagnostic services (Aderonmu, 2017). The N-power teach programme engages qualified graduates for the benefit of basic education at primary and secondary school levels. They are deployed as teaching assistants in primary and secondary schools across Nigeria. They are not to replace the already existing teachers in various public schools, but are to play supportive roles to the teachers, assisting with teaching, school management, and other functions within the schools. They assist in taking basic education to children in marginalized communities (Aderonmu, 2017).

The technological component of the N-power scheme called N-tech involves training youths in computer, information technology (IT), hardware and software development, web design, etc. The N-power tech was designed to engage about 100,000 technopreneurs and young IT enthusiasts to drive technological innovations in the country. Although, the initiative is barely five years old, our focus in this study is to access the potentials of the scheme vis-à-vis youth unemployment reduction in Nigeria, as well as the current challenges facing its implementation. The above analysis, therefore, provided the motivation for the study N-power Scheme and youth unemployment in Nigeria: An Analysis of Management and Government Policy

Inconsistency.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

High number of unemployment which has bedeviled our society today especially among the youths is so daring that every aspect of our society is experiencing its unwanted effects day after day unabated. Presently, the fear of “Unknown Gun Men” (UGM) has paralyzed the activities of some states in our country instilling fear in every sector of the economy. They includes broad day attacks of police stations, incessant killings here and there, robbery, kidnapping, rapes, car snatching, prostitution, and lots more, all these can be attributed to increasing unemployment in our society and youths are the most vulnerable in it all.

Nigeria has over 50% of its populations under the age of 30 (NPC, 2014). Therefore, it can be asserted that the economy of Nigeria is a youth economy. The present administration’s intervention is a testament to the failure of previous attempts by past administrations to stem the tide. The N-power volunteer corps scheme is a human capital initiative of the federal government aimed at engaging 500,000 unemployed graduates in various aspects such as teaching and community education (N-Teach), agriculture (N-Agro), health services (N-Health), and tax consultancy and advisory services (N-Tax). There is also the non-graduate category of the N-power volunteer corps scheme that intends to absorb another set of 100,000 young Nigerians in different aspects like building and construction (N-Build) and computer repairs and maintenance, both hardware and software (N-Tech).

As commendable as engaging 500,000 unemployed graduates in various aspects such as teaching and community education may be, the figure is infinitesimal when we compare it with the large army of unemployed young Nigerians looking for jobs. The

N-power volunteer corps scheme, aside from providing temporary employment for unemployed Nigerian graduates, is supposed to engage these young Nigerians for about a period of two years in various activities to help them acquire relevant job skills and improve their employability. The application for the first batch of intakes into the scheme was done over five years ago – June 2016 – and the first batch of beneficiaries are supposed to have passed out in May or June 2018. But for some political considerations, especially with regards to the 2019 general elections, the first batch of the N-power volunteers were retained and only disengaged after the general elections, sometime in 2020, making it obvious that the government seemed not to know exactly what to do with them. The obvious sign of policy inconsistency has made it difficult, if not impossible to absorb another batch of 400,000 volunteers. This raises a great question about the sustainability of the scheme in the medium and long term.

It is in the light of these challenges that the researchers are embarking on this study to investigate challenges confronting the N-power Scheme and youth unemployment reduction in Nigeria with its attendant success, problems, and sustainability.

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The broad objective of this study is to assess the relationship between N-power Scheme and youth unemployment reduction in Nigeria. The specific objective was:

1. To determine the extent to which management problems and government policy Inconsistency has affected the implementation of the N-power scheme on youth Unemployment reduction in Nigeria

RESEARCH QUESTION

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent have management problems and government policy inconsistency affected the implementation of the N-power scheme on youth unemployment reduction in Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

The following hypothesis was formulated for the study:

1. **Ho:** Management problems and government policy inconsistency have no effects the implementation of the N-power scheme on youth unemployment reduction in Nigeria.

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN NIGERIA: A BRIEF EXPLANATION

Youth unemployment occurs when young people are without jobs and they have actively sought for employment opportunity within the past four weeks (ILO, 2012). The United Nations defines youth unemployment as the share of the labour force aged 15 to 24 inclusive without work but available for and seeking employment. Youth unemployment is one of the macro-economic problems which every responsible government is expected to monitor and regulate. The higher the unemployment rate among the young people in an economy, the higher would be the poverty level and associated welfare challenges. Unemployment is one of the developmental problems that face every developing economy in the 21st century, and Nigeria is not exempted. Its impact is felt more by the youths, leading to youth unemployment.

According to Olaleye (2010), massive youth unemployment in any country is an indication of far more complex problems. Nigeria's unemployment can be grouped into

two categories: the older unemployed who lost their jobs through retrenchment, redundancy; and the younger unemployed, most of who have never tasted what it is to be employed. When the supply of labor outstrips the demand for labor, it causes joblessness and unemployment. Given the lack of sufficient employment opportunities in the formal sector, young people may be compelled to engage in casual work and other unorthodox livelihood sources, thus leading to underemployment.

1990 - 2000 data on youth unemployment showed that the largest group of the unemployed is the secondary school graduates. About 40% unemployment rate occur among urban youth between 20 – 24 years of age and a 31% rate among those aged 15 - 19. Two-third of the urban unemployed occurs among 15 – 24 years old, moreover, the educated unemployed tended to be young males with few dependents. There are relatively few secondary school graduates and the lowered job expectations of primary-school graduates. There is no consistent trend of unemployment rates in Nigeria. An increase in one or two years is sometimes followed by a decline in the subsequent years (Okafor, 2011).

CAUSES OF YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN NIGERIA:

Some of them include:

Structural Factors: Structural inhibitors in the growth of unemployment came into existence in the Nigerian education policies since the Nation's independence in 1960. Even during the period before independence, education during the colonial era was merely based more on language and communication with emphasis on reading and writing. The aim was for the local people to be able to effectively communicate with the colonial master. There was little or no emphasis on science, technology, or vocational education.

This tradition continued until after independence where an educational system that places less emphasis on skills acquisition was bequeathed to Nigeria. Between 1960 and now, Nigeria has introduced and implemented not less than three different educational policies. These are the 7:5:2:3; the 6:3:3:4, and now the 9:3:3:4 (elementary, secondary and university). The new campaign for the re-introduction of Higher School Certificate (HSC) programme which was a two-year post-secondary programme that prepared students for university education. This reaction followed the very poor performance of secondary school leavers (87% failure rate) in the West African Examination Council (WAEC) in 2010. One of the major problems of past education policies stems from the fact that the new policies are not allowed to run their full course before they are changed. What this means is that some of the past policies may not have been well conceived before implementation.

Socio-cultural Interferences: Culturally, Nigerians are enterprising people, especially those from the south-eastern part of Nigeria who has carved a niche for themselves in entrepreneurship, agriculture, and artistry/artisanship. However, many youths in recent times believe that the only sure route to success is pursuing career development in the elitist professions such as medicine, law, and engineering regardless of whether they have the aptitude, interest or resources. This mindset is fueled further by loss of the age-old value system. People still perceive artisans and craftsmen as social outcasts who should remain permanently at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder. Society now seems to worship wealth (regardless of the source) and churches, mosques, and the communities reward some of these questionable acquisitions with Knighthood and chieftaincy titles respectively. A visit to a typical auto-mechanic garage in Nigeria will show that unlike what used to be the practice whereby a master auto-mechanic had 3 to 7 apprentices under his tutelage, one will be lucky to find one or two learning the trade.

Others will opt out after 3 to 6 months to start riding motorbike (Okada) for quick money making, while the few who remain do not stay long enough to acquire the skills to be proficient in the trade. Some of the Nigerian legislators encourage this behaviour by donating motorcycles to youths in their constituencies under the nebulous name of "Youth Empowerment." It is doubtful if Nigeria will still have artisans and technicians in another 20 to 30 years.

Skewed Budgetary Allocations: After China and India, Nigeria is the fastest growing economy in the world with a growth rate of 7.2% (Yusuf, 2012). This figure is expected to increase to double-digit growth typical of the Asian tiger economies. This growth rate is being achieved despite the energy challenges, financial crisis, and global economic meltdown. Although Nigeria's economy is projected to grow at determined percentage, the poverty situation is likely to get worse as the gap between the rich and the poor continue to widen. One reason that may be attributed to this is defective leadership, corruption, and poorly articulated policy implementations. For example, the federal government's share of distributable revenue is 54 percent, states 25 percent, and local government 19 percent. Out of the share accruing to the Federal Government, only about 20-30 percent goes to capital expenditure, while the rest goes to recurrent and overhead expenditure. It can be argued that there is an inverse relationship between income and capital expansion. Therefore, by committing more resources to infrastructural development, the government is indirectly impacting on incremental incomes of the citizenry.

Lack of Political Will: The neglect of vocational/technical education has been robbing the nation of the potential contributions of its graduates to national growth and economic development. The inability of policy-makers to make rational and informed decisions continue to affect the rate of progress of the Nigerian Nation, as Dike, (2009)

has noted, the underdevelopment status of Nigeria could be linked to the neglect of its educational institutions. Although science and technology have been a part of Nigeria's National Policy on Primary Education (NPE), implementation has always been the major problem. Consequently, the society lacks competent artisans such as bricklayers, carpenters, graphic designers, auto mechanics, laboratory technicians, and pharmacists.

Poorly Coordinated Intervention Programmes: As nations advance into the 21st century, governments are shrinking and shedding the toga of major employers of labour. However, the rate of reduction varies from country to country due to what is perceived as political and social consequences. This partly explains why in most developing countries; the government is the major employer of labour. This is usually the case in the absence of a vibrant private sector.

Skills acquisition serves as a veritable vehicle to promoting employment generation has been a part of the policy thrust of past Nigerian governments in Nigeria. However, most interventions have been poorly coordinated and in some cases encounter policy somersault. Starting from the emergence of the Directorate of Food Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Family Support Programme (FSP), National Economic Empowerment Development Strategies (NEEDS), and the People Bank of Nigeria (PBN) all these intervention programmes mentioned above were intended to promote employment generation in Nigeria. Most of the past intervention programmes were implemented on ad-hoc basis; poorly coordinated, and marred by corruption, and inefficiency. However, Instead of reducing unemployment to the barest minimum the reverse seems to be the case. According to the Nigerian Living Standard Survey (NLSS, 2009 to 2014) an estimated poverty level at 54% was predicted, implying that approximately 75 million Nigerians were unemployed. This figure is expected to be higher when lay-offs and outright closures due to the global

economic meltdown since 2008, and Covid-19 pandemic. Government efforts at promoting skill acquisition through the establishment of vocational training institutions have also not yielded the desired result; even though Omoruyi and Osunde (2004) note that more vocational skills training centers are being established. Although more vocational training institutions are being established the youths are not motivated to take advantage of opportunities associated with vocational education due to some of the above reasons. For example, it is common to find many Nigerian legislators donate motorcycles and pepper grinding machines to youths in their constituencies under the name of “youth empowerment,” while those that take to entrepreneurship are faced with the problems of unfavourable business environment, poor infrastructural facilities, lack of access to loans and credit etc.

Data Analysis

Question 1: To what extent have management problems and government policy inconsistency affected the implementation of the N-power scheme on youth unemployment reduction in Nigeria?

Table 1: Respondents’ responses to Management Problems and government policy inconsistency

S/N	Statements	Σfx	X	Decision
	Management Problems and Government Policy inconsistency of the N-power scheme			

1	Lack of clearer definition of purpose contributes to the inability of the government to engage another batch into the scheme.	1312	4.55	Agreed
2	Lack of strategic planning poses a greater challenge to the N-power scheme on youth unemployment reduction.	1270	4.40	Agreed
3	The inability of the government to effectively disengage the first batch of the beneficiaries timely by providing them soft loans to kick start their self-employment plans was as a result of poor management of the scheme.	1136	3.94	Agreed
4	Government policy inconsistency hinders engagement of another batch into the N-power programme.	1296	4.50	Agreed
5	Misappropriation and diversion of funds by the top management staff dwindles the achievement of the objective of the scheme	1182	4.10	Agreed

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Table 1

Correlations

		N-power Scheme	Management Problem and Government Policy Inconsistency
N-power Scheme	Pearson Correlation	1	.956
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.011
	N	288	288
Management Problem and Government Policy Inconsistency	Pearson Correlation	.956	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.011	
	N	288	288

The focus of table 1 is on the management problem and government policy inconsistency. This table has five statements to which the respondents agreed to all the statements in the table above. Respondents, in the first statement, were asked whether lack of clearer definition of purpose contributes to the inability of the government to engage another batch into the scheme. Their response was positive as indicated by the mean score of 4.55. Respondents also agreed to the second, third, fourth, and fifth statements that lack of strategic planning poses a problem to the N-power scheme on youth unemployment reduction; the inability of the government to assist the first batch of the n-power beneficiaries with facility after their period elapses; Government policy

inconsistency hampers engagement of another batch into the N-power programme; and that Misappropriation and diversion of funds by the top management staff dwindles the achievement of the objective of the scheme.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study has proved that lack of strategic planning poses a problem to the N-power scheme on youth unemployment reduction. This is no doubt a management problem that has contributed adversely to negate the sustainability of government policy on the N-Power scheme and Youth unemployment in Nigeria. To forestall government problems and policy inconsistency, it is herein recommended that policy formulators should remove all factors that have contributed in enthroning policy inconsistency.

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