



## **Comparative Assessment of N-Power Agro Programme on Youth Empowerment in Edo and Delta States, Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

*The study compared N-Power Agro programme implementation on youths' empowerment in Edo and Delta States, Nigeria. Purposive and cluster random sampling techniques were used to select 180 samples for the study. Data were collected from primary source, while percentage standard deviation and mean statistic were used for data analysis. The findings showed that the beneficiaries had high level of participation in the programme's activities in Delta and Edo states with grand mean of 3.66 and 3.52, respectively. The programme brought great changes in the beneficiaries' livelihood in both States such as reduced their poverty, improved their working experience, increased their ICT proficiency, influenced their satisfaction of basic needs, provided adequate skills that made them to be employers of labour, and improved their income above their previous level. Delay in payment of stipend to participants, long distance to area of primary assignment, shortage of extension agents, mismanagement of funds, insufficient information about the programme, bribery and corruption among staff, overbearing hands of politicians in the programme, poor funding, and pattern of recruitment of the participants were the serious challenges to implementation of the programme in Delta and Edo States. It is recommended that government should increase the awareness campaign on importance of the programme as a solution to poverty, and also ensure prompt and timely payment of the stipends to beneficiaries of the programme.*

**Keywords:** N-Power Agro Programme, Youths' Empowerment, Challenges

### **Introduction**

Youth in Nigeria includes citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria aged 18-29 years, while the National Youth Policy defines youth as any individual between the ages of 15 and 29 (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2019). Mac-Ikemenjima (2020) defined youth as any individual between the ages of 15 and 30. This definition derives primarily from the age range of the students in the study cohort, rather than convention or theory. Youths are positive force for transformational change. The Nigerian government however characterizes youth as ambitious, enthusiastic, energetic and promising. They are considered vulnerable in society because of the rapid pace of change they experience at this time in their lives (FRN, 2019).

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa with one of the largest populations of youth in the world, comprising 33,652,424 members. As a result, the median age is 17.9 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2017). A large portion of this category of people are either in schools or engaged as artisans or traders while a greater proportion remains unemployed. The majority of these unemployed youths have their eyes on getting paid jobs, especially white-collar jobs, which are scarce (Olusola, 2017). Nationally, the labour market participation rate of young university graduates have significantly declined since the 1970s, with as many as 22 percent of graduates being unemployed by official statistics, although this could be much higher (Akande, 2014). Youth unemployment and underemployment rates combined stood at 67.3 percent in the third quarter of 2017 (NBS, 2017).

Makinde and Adegbam (2019) noted that a high rate of unemployment has led to a growing number of Nigerian youths trying all means to leave the shore of the country in search of greener pastures. It has also forced many of the youths into "unpalatable activities" such as prostituting, thuggery, hooliganism, drugs addicting and peddling, armed robbery and hired assassin. Thus, politicians to achieve their inordinate ambitions are using the most energetic part of the country's population that supposed to contribute to the nation's development. According to the 2015 Global Employment Trends for Youth report of the International Labour Organization (ILO) (2015), youth remain overrepresented among the unemployed and shaken by the changing patterns in the labour market. This calls for youth empowerment towards job creation for massive youth employment opportunities.



Youth empowerment is a process where children and young people are encouraged to take charge of their lives. They do this by addressing their situation and then take action in order to improve their access to resources and transform their consciousness through their beliefs, values, and attitudes (Odogwu, 2017). In reaction to the endemic situation of unemployment and its perceived relationship with poverty and disempowerment, Odey and Sambe (2019) recalled that Federal Government of Nigeria initiated strategic plan for Job creation and youth empowerment in 2016. 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 (Department for International Development, 2017; N-Power, 2017).

N-Power is a Federal Government of Nigeria programme under the social investment programme for job creation and empowerment initiatives. It is a programme that is intended to reduce unemployment by helping them to create jobs and engaging them in activities while unemployed (Okoro and Basse, 2018). In essence, one of the objectives of the programme was to boost the human capital of the Nigerian labour force. In its introduction, the Federal Government provided 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 Nigerian citizens between the ages of 18 and 35 in public primary schools, primary healthcare centres and agriculture in all the local government areas in Nigeria. 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 (N-Power, 2017). The programme is still on-going covering all the 36 states of the federation in which millions of youths have benefited. The modular programmes under N-Power ensured that each participant learn and practice most of what is necessary to find work. The goals of N-Power are to: 1. intervene and directly improve the livelihood of a critical mass of young unemployed Nigerians; 2. develop a qualitative system of the transfer of employability, entrepreneurial and technical skills; 3. create an ecosystem of solutions for ailing public services and government diversification policies; and 4. develop and enhance Nigeria's knowledge economy (Odey and Sambe, 2019; N-Power, 2017).

Based upon this premise, the main objective of this study was to carry-out comparative assessment of N-Power Agro programme on youths' empowerment in Edo and Delta States, Nigeria. The N-Power Agro –The Programme 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. The specific objectives of the study were to:

- i. compare youths' levels of participation in the various activities of the programme in the two States;
- ii. assess the changes brought about by the programme on the livelihood of youths; and
- iii. identify the challenges to effective implementation of the programme in both states.

## Methodology

The study was conducted in Edo and Delta States. Edo State lies between longitude 6°00' and 6°45' East and latitude 5°00' and 6°30' North of the equator. It is bounded in the North and East by Kogi State, in the South by Delta State, in the South-West by Ondo State. Edo State has 18 local government areas (LGAs) with the capital at Benin. Edo State is divided into three geopolitical zones (Edo South, Edo Central and Edo North). It has an estimated population of 3,218, 332 made up of 1,640,461 males and 1, 577, 871 females and a growth rate of 2.7% per annum (NPC, 2006), as well as a total landmass of 19,187 square kilometres, the State has a population density of about 168 persons per square kilometres. The 2016 population projection is 4,235,600 (National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 2018a). Agriculture is the mainstay of the economy. Delta State is divided into three geopolitical zones (Delta North, Delta South and Delta Central). The State has 25 Local Government Areas (LGAs). It is situated in the region known as the South-South geo-political zone with a population of 4,112,445 (males: 2,069,309; females: 2,043,136) (NPC, 2006). The 2016 projected population of Delta State is 5,663,400 (NBS, 2018b). The state lies approximately between 5°00' and 6°45' E and 5°00' and 6°30' N. It is geographically located in Nigeria's Midwest, bounded in the north and west by Edo State, the east by Anambra, Imo, and Rivers States, southeast by Bayelsa State, and on the southern extreme is the Bight of Benin which covers about 160 kilometres of the state's coastline. Delta State is generally low-lying without any remarkable hills. The state has a wide coastal belt inter-lace with rivulets and streams, which form part of the Niger River Delta. It is an oil and agricultural producing state in Nigeria.

The population of the study comprised all beneficiaries of N-Power programme in Edo and Delta States, South-South Nigeria. Purposive and cluster random sampling techniques were used in selection of 180 beneficiaries selected from the two states, comprised 90 beneficiaries each from Edo and Delta States. The sampling was drawn from the N-Agro category of the programme. All the six senatorial zones in the two states were involved in the study. This gave a total of 180 beneficiaries selected from the two states, comprising 90 beneficiaries each from Edo and Delta States. Data for the study were collected from primary source through validated questionnaire. Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, standard deviation and mean statistic were used for data analysis.

## Results and Discussion

### Levels of Youths' Participation in the Various Activities of N-Agro Programme

Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents according to levels of participation in the various activities of the N-Agro programme. The table reveals that the beneficiaries in Delta state had high level participation in extension advisory services ( $\bar{x} = 3.55$ ), teaching ( $\bar{x} = 2.52$ ), training on skill acquisition ( $\bar{x} = 2.67$ ), and agric. entrepreneurship (farming) ( $\bar{x} = 2.72$ ), while researching ( $\bar{x} = 2.14$ ) and farm developers ( $\bar{x} = 2.33$ ) recorded low participation by the respondents. In Edo State, the respondents recorded high level of participation in extension advisory services ( $\bar{x} = 2.82$ ), training on skill acquisition ( $\bar{x} = 2.56$ ), farm developers ( $\bar{x} = 2.85$ ) and agric. entrepreneurship (farming) ( $\bar{x} = 2.72$ ), while the respondents had low participation in teaching ( $\bar{x} = 2.34$ ) and researching ( $\bar{x} = 2.22$ ). These imply that the beneficiaries participated actively in many of the programme activities in both states in order to improve their wellbeing.

Further analysis in Table 1 indicates that the grand mean of the beneficiaries' level of participation in the programme's activities in Delta and Edo States were 3.66 and 3.52, respectively. This shows that the level of participation is high in both states but that of Delta State is higher. The findings are in line with Nwuzoh (2018) who recalled that N-Power is aimed at providing opportunities in skills acquisition, competency building, and entrepreneurship training among the poor for human capital development. According to Nwaobi (2019), the N-Power Agro volunteers are meant to function as intermediaries between research and farmers. They operate as facilitators and communicators, helping farmers in their decision-making and ensuring that appropriate knowledge is implemented to obtain the best results on farms.

**Table 1: Levels of participation in the various activities of the N-Agro programme**

N-Agro Programme Activity	Level of participation	
	Delta state (n=90) $\bar{x}$	Edo state (n=90) $\bar{x}$
Extension advisory services	3.55*	2.82*
Teaching	2.52*	2.34
Training on skill acquisition	2.67*	2.56*
Researching	2.14	2.22
Farm developers	2.33	2.58*
Farmers(agric. entrepreneurship)	2.72*	2.85*
<b>Grand Mean</b>	<b>2.66*</b>	<b>2.52*</b>

**Source:** Field survey, 2021. \* =  $\bar{x} \geq 2.5$  = high level of participation

### Youths' Perceptions of Changes Brought about by the Programme on their Livelihood

Table 2 shows youths' perceptions of changes brought about by the programme on their livelihood in Delta and Edo States. According to the table, the programme brought great changes in Delta State on the beneficiaries' livelihood such as reduced their poverty ( $\bar{x} = 2.73$ ), improved their working experience ( $\bar{x} = 2.62$ ), made them to be financial independence ( $\bar{x} = 2.56$ ), increased their ICT proficiency ( $\bar{x} = 2.80$ ), influenced their satisfaction of basic needs such as food, consumption, health status, shelter etc. ( $\bar{x} = 2.77$ ), significantly provided adequate skills that make them to be employers of labour ( $\bar{x} = 3.00$ ), improved their income above their previous level ( $\bar{x} = 3.89$ ), created jobs for them ( $\bar{x} = 2.67$ ), and improved their economic well-being ( $\bar{x} = 2.88$ ). Only business set up ( $\bar{x} = 2.43$ ) attracted low change by the programme as indicated by the respondents. Also, the table reveals that in Edo State, the programme made great changes in livelihood of youths in reduced poverty ( $\bar{x} = 2.87$ ), improved working experience ( $\bar{x} = 2.55$ ), ICT proficiency ( $\bar{x} = 2.54$ ), influenced satisfaction of basic needs such as food, consumption, health status, shelter etc. ( $\bar{x} = 2.90$ ), provision of adequate skills that make them to be employers of labour ( $\bar{x} = 2.68$ ), improved the income of the beneficiaries above their previous level ( $\bar{x} = 3.15$ ), job creation



( $\bar{x} = 2.72$ ), and economic well-being ( $\bar{x} = 2.66$ ). However, the programme made small changes in financial independence ( $\bar{x} = 2.33$ ), and business set up ( $\bar{x} = 2.34$ ) in Edo State. The findings imply that N-Agro made great impact in the livelihood of youths who benefited from it in Delta and Ebonyi states.

The findings are in agreement with Odey and Sambe (2019) who indicated contribution of N-Power to empowerment of beneficiaries. According to them, the programme empowered them through poverty reduction, increased their proficiency in ICT, ensured their financial independence, increased working experience, and helped them set up businesses. Abin (2018) noted that N-Power Programme improved socio-economic lives of the beneficiaries by contributing immensely to their financial, material, social well-being. This is because in Nigeria according to him, financial independence seem to give people considerable ability to make choices and also control on their lives. According to Daura, Joel and Audu (2020), the implementation of N-power has improved the income of the beneficiaries above their previous level. To them, majority of the respondents were living below the minimum pay of the scheme before their enrolment but now their income has significantly improved, with some of them even saving for future. Some of them confessed that they have never owned thirty thousand naira cash on monthly bases until their enrolment into the Programme.

**Table 4.4: Youths' perceptions of changes brought about by the programme on their livelihood**

Intervention changes	Extent of changes			
	Delta state (n=90)		Edo state (n=90)	
	$\bar{x}$	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD
Reduced poverty	2.73*	0.304	2.87*	0.597
Improved working experience	2.62*	0.362	2.55*	0.877
Financial independence	2.56*	0.427	2.33	0.834
ICT proficiency	2.80*	0.385	2.54*	0.572
Business set up	2.43	0.385	2.34	0.966
Influenced satisfaction of basic needs such as food, consumption, health status, shelter etc	2.77*	0.385	2.90*	0.816
Significantly provided adequate skills that make them to be employers of labour	3.00*	0.385	2.68*	0.742
Improved the income of the beneficiaries above their previous level	3.89*	0.608	3.15*	0.742
Job creation	2.67*	0.608	2.72*	0.660
Economic well-being	2.88*	0.423	2.66*	0.853

**Source:** Field survey, 2021. \* =  $\bar{x} \geq 2.5$  = great change

### Challenges to Effective Implementation of N-Agro Programme

Table 3 shows the mean distribution of respondents according to challenges to effective implementation of the N-Agro programme among beneficiaries in Delta and Edo States. The serious challenges to implementation of the programme in Delta state include delay/ non-payment of stipend to participants as at when due ( $\bar{x} = 2.98$ ), inadequate fund/stipend received ( $\bar{x} = 2.75$ ), long distance to area of primary assignment ( $\bar{x} = 3.68$ ), shortage of extension advisors/personnel for training ( $\bar{x} = 2.63$ ), misplacement of enrollees as area of specialization is not considered ( $\bar{x} = 2.57$ ), mismanagement of funds ( $\bar{x} = 3.38$ ), insufficient information/ inadequate information about the programme ( $\bar{x} = 2.67$ ), bribery and corruption among staff and management ( $\bar{x} = 2.80$ ), overbearing hands of politicians in the programme/ politics (participant nomination and selection) ( $\bar{x} = 2.60$ ), high transportation fare paid by the participants to work ( $\bar{x} = 2.58$ ), website and internet hiccups ( $\bar{x} = 2.53$ ), poor funding of the programme ( $\bar{x} = 2.85$ ), pattern of recruitment of the enrollees in which rural areas are not covered ( $\bar{x} = 2.75$ ), poor awareness of the programme ( $\bar{x} = 2.57$ ), poor access to internet among rural youth ( $\bar{x} = 2.77$ ), and bottlenecks in programme execution ( $\bar{x} = 2.58$ ). Inadequate training ( $\bar{x} = 2.35$ ), inconsistency of placement of enrollees ( $\bar{x} = 2.34$ ), and wrong bank verification number (BVN) ( $\bar{x} = 2.10$ ) with low weighted mean values were regarded as not serious challenges to the programme. In Edo State, delay/ non-payment of stipend to participants as at when due ( $\bar{x} = 2.65$ ), long distance to area of primary assignment ( $\bar{x} = 3.20$ ), shortage of extension advisors/personnel for training ( $\bar{x} = 3.00$ ), misplacement of enrollees as area of specialization is not considered ( $\bar{x} = 2.68$ ), mismanagement of funds ( $\bar{x} = 3.15$ ), insufficient information/ inadequate information about the programme ( $\bar{x} = 2.75$ ), bribery and corruption among staff and management ( $\bar{x} = 3.13$ ), overbearing hands of politicians in the programme/ politics (participant nomination and selection) ( $\bar{x} = 3.05$ ), high transportation fare paid by the participants to work ( $\bar{x} = 2.55$ ), website and internet hiccups ( $\bar{x} = 2.85$ ), poor funding of the programme ( $\bar{x} =$

2.65), pattern of recruitment of the enrollees in which rural areas are not covered ( $\bar{x} = 2.50$ ), poor awareness of the programme ( $\bar{x} = 2.85$ ), poor access to internet among rural youth ( $\bar{x} = 2.75$ ), and bottlenecks in programme execution ( $\bar{x} = 2.67$ ) were the serious challenges to effective implementation of the programme. The challenges with low weighted mean values such as inadequate fund/stipend received ( $\bar{x} = 2.48$ ), inadequate training ( $\bar{x} = 2.25$ ), inconsistency of placement of enrollees ( $\bar{x} = 2.20$ ), and wrong bank verification number (BVN) ( $\bar{x} = 2.15$ ) were regarded as not serious challenges to the programme implementation in the area.

These findings imply that there are numerous challenges to effective implementation of the programme, and out of the 19 identified challenges, 16 and 15 challenges were serious challenges in Delta and Edo states, respectively. The findings are in line with Odey and Sambe (2019) who noted that most of the beneficiaries identified delay in payment of allowance, unpaid allowance, distance to working places, lack of teacher training for most of N-Teach beneficiaries as issues constraining N-Power implementation. 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. Daura, Joel and Audu (2020) identified mismanagement of funds allocated to the running of daily affairs of the scheme, placement of enrollees especially graduates from the arts and social sciences disciplines were major problems confronting the implementation of the scheme. Also, delay of payment for new enrollees according to Daura et al. (2020) is a challenge confronting the scheme especially for those enrollees that have not been able to complete their registration and documentation at the early time. Also, the findings agreed with Akujuru (2019) who indicated that one of the major factors affecting the implementation of N-Power programmes towards poverty alleviation in Rivers State is ‘non-payment of stipend to participants as at when due’, and others include ‘insufficient information’ ‘high transportation fare paid by the participants to work’ and ‘wrong bank verification number (BVN), overbearing hands of politicians in the programme, poor funding of the programme’ ‘website and internet hiccups. Nwaleji, Okeke, Uzuegbunam and Udemezue (2018) show that the major challenges of youth involvement in initiated agricultural programmes and projects were lack of involvement at planning and introduction stages, poor access to land and other farm inputs, misconception of youth as nuisance in the society, most of the programmes’ objectives do not address youths felt need, bottlenecks in programme execution, corruption and corrupt practices in programme implementation, politics (participant nomination and selection), inadequate incentives from the programme, and inadequate information about the existence of the programmes.

**Table 4.6: Challenges to effective implementation of the programme among beneficiaries in Delta and Edo states**

Challenge	Delta state (n=90)		Edo state (n=90)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Delay/non-payment of stipend to participants as at when due	2.98*	0.858	2.65*	0.533
Inadequate fund/stipend received	2.75*	0.950	2.48	0.506
Inadequate training	2.35	0.630	2.25	0.439
Long distance to area of primary assignment	3.68*	0.694	3.20*	0.405
Shortage of extension advisors/personnel for training	2.63*	0.838	3.00*	0.464
Inconsistency of placement of enrollees	2.34	0.740	2.20	0.405
Misplacement of enrollees as area of specialization is not considered	2.57*	0.844	2.68*	0.385
Mismanagement of funds	3.38*	0.740	3.15*	0.362
Insufficient information/ inadequate information about the programme	2.68*	0.933	2.75*	0.362
Bribery and corruption among staff and management	2.80*	0.564	3.13*	0.563
Wrong Bank Verification Number (BVN)	2.10	0.758	2.15	0.304
Overbearing hands of politicians in the programme/ politics (participant nomination and selection)	2.60*	0.672	3.05*	0.221
High transportation fare paid by the participants to work	2.58*	0.747	2.55*	0.221
Website and internet hiccups	2.53*	0.751	2.85*	0.389
Poor funding of the programme	2.85*	0.846	2.63*	0.480
Pattern of recruitment of the enrollees in which rural areas are not covered	2.75*	0.959	2.50*	0.450
Poor awareness of the programme	2.57*	0.774	2.85*	0.580
Poor access to internet among rural youth	2.77*	0.667	2.75*	0.588
Bottlenecks in programme execution	2.68*	0.506	2.67*	0.572

Source: Field survey, 2021. \*=  $\bar{x} \geq 2.5$  = serious challenge



## Conclusion

The N-Power Agro beneficiaries had high level of participation in the programme's activities in Delta and Edo States. The programme brought positive changes in the beneficiaries' livelihood in reduction of their poverty, improved their working experience and ICT proficiency, increased their income, influenced their satisfaction of basic needs, and created jobs for them. However, delay/ non-payment of stipend to participants, long distance to area of primary assignment, shortage of extension advisors, mismanagement of funds, insufficient information about the programme, bribery and corruption among staff, overbearing hands of politicians in the programme, high poor access to internet among others were identified as the serious challenges to implementation of the programme in the two States.

## Recommendations

- i. Government should ensure prompt and timely payment of the stipends to beneficiaries of the programme. The management of the programme should ensure that beneficiaries who have issues with the payment of their allowances are timely and judiciously treated to solve problems of unpaid allowances.
- ii. Postings should be determined by beneficiary's professionalism and proximity to place of primary assignment to avoid issue of the beneficiaries spending most of their stipends on transport in order to save money for other meaningful ventures.
- iii. The government should increase the awareness campaign on the importance of the programme as a solution to poverty and also ensure a corrupt, crime and violence free society in order to increase participation.

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