

## **POVERTY ERADICATION IN NORTH-WESTERN NIGERIA: AN EVALUATION OF SOCIAL INVESTMENT PROGRAMS**

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### **Abstract**

Poverty in Nigeria is palpable and evident even in the presence of rich material and human resources. The federal government of Nigeria has introduced many intervention programmes like the social investment programme. The social investment program federal government of Nigeria was established in 2016 with the main objective of tackling poverty and hunger across the country. The program was designed to ensure a more equitable distribution of resources to vulnerable populations, including children, youth and women. The government has four programs: N-Power for young graduates to develop skills, Conditional Cash Transfer for those in extreme poverty, Government Enterprise and Empowerment Program for traders, and School Feeding Program to increase school enrollment. To date, the government have been investing a large amount of their annual budget into the program. The objective of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the Nigerian federal government's social investment program. The study focused on the program's objectives, its approach to addressing the needs of poverty-stricken individuals, and its strengths and weaknesses. The study adopted a qualitative research design. The participants were twenty (20) persons drawn from five northwestern states of Nigeria. Data were generated using a structured interview. The collected data was analyzed and categorized into themes. The findings showed that the programme aims to reduce poverty by creating jobs for the youth and helping people set up businesses. However, finding revealed that the objectives of the government programme were not met as the trainees could not be employed. The programme needs wider coverage, strict supervision, and monitoring to achieve its goals. The weaknesses of the programme include politics, corruption, bribery and lack of transparency. It was recommended that the government and stakeholders should decentralize the programme and honest and transparent people should be incorporated.

### **Keywords**

Poverty Eradication, Social Investment Program, Evaluation & Effectiveness

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**Introduction:**

A good standard of living is an important component of social security that contributes to individual quality of life. The main key factors that are considered in determining whether a particular area has a good standard of living or not is their average income, consumer spending, affordable housing price, and available goods and services. Other factors that may be included in examining the standard of living in an area is their access to medical care, educational opportunities, infrastructure, climate, crime rate, and level of economic stability in the area. According to United Nation (1990) the measure of standard of living of an area is determine by the life expectancy at birth, adult literacy rate and income per capita. Regardless of these factors, this measure plays an important part in the social coexistence among the people living in the area and understand the objective of life. Traditionally many people believe that violence and vicious circles of poverty are associated with religion practiced in the area (Casimir et al., 2014). This has contradicted with assertion of Ruben (2011) that religion in all its form influences development for betterment of the people. Recently, investigators have examined the effect of social investment on poverty, insecurity, and higher level of inequality. According to UN (2007) “The creation of productive employment opportunity is essential for achieving poverty reduction and sustainable economic and social development” (p. 1.) This will not only provide employment opportunity to the citizen if implemented effectively but also ensure adequate social coexistence and harmony. Recent evidence suggests that the best route to eradicate poverty, socio economic development and improve personal wellbeing of the people is through decent work (UN, 2007). Equally, the Millennium Development Goals (SDG) of halting extreme poverty has highlighted the important of productive employment opportunity that would focus on creating better and more productive jobs. The job should absorb higher concentration of the working poor by investing in labor intensive industries, especially agriculture and upgrade job quality in the informal economy (SDG, 2015). Furthermore, the internationally agreed development goals reiterated that government should also focus “*on providing poor people with the necessary skills and assets that will enable them to take full advantage of any expansion in employment potential*” (UN, 2007, P. 1)

However, the federal government of Nigeria established social investment program in 2016 with the main objective of tackling poverty and hunger across the country. The program was designed to ensure more equitable distribution of resources to vulnerable population, including children,

youth and women. The program comprises: the N-Power which is designed to assist young graduates to acquire and develop life-long skills; the Conditional Cash Transfer which is designed to support those within the lowest poverty brackets; the Government Enterprise and Empowerment Program is a micro- lending intervention for traders; the Home Grown School Feeding Program is to deliver school feeding to young children with a specific focus on increasing school enrollment and empowering community women as cooks (NSIP, 2021). To date the government have been investing large amount of their annual budget into the program. According to the year 2021 annual budget the government has budgeted #765 billion for social investment programs (Premium times, 2021). Despite the large amount of money spend in the programs since its inception in the year 2016, Nigeria is no doubt currently among the countries embattled with a higher rate of poverty (Afeez, & Ireen, 2020; NNBS, 2021; World Bank 2020; UN, 2021), and unemployment (Afeez, & Ireen, 2020; World Bank, 2020). World Bank asserted that higher inflation of the country has plunged seven million Nigerians into poverty (NNBS, 2021). The report further stated that 47.3% of Nigerians or 98 million people are living in multidimensional poverty and most of them living in Northern Nigeria (NNBS, 2021). These figures are not sufficient enough to explain the nature of the poverty in the region due to higher increase of food prices. Recent report shows that an average Nigerian household spends about 56% of income on food (NNBS, 2021).

Furthermore, the prevalence of poverty in the region has become issue of concern to the extent that many people doubt about the efficiency of social investment programs in eradicating poverty and hunger. The recent released poverty index according to the geographical region has shown that, poverty in the region has been increasing especially in the north-west zone. According to the report almost half of all poor lived in north-west and the north accounts for 87.3 percent of all poor in Nigeria (NNBS, 2021; UN, 2020; World Bank 2021). The reports were unsatisfactory because the region is blessed with enormous resources, and fertile land with varied agricultural product, and still remain the backward, engulfed with higher rate of poverty, banditry, kidnapping and out of school children. Therefore, the objective of this study is to assess social investment program in the region and determine the objectives of the programs, how the programs was implemented and why the poverty is still increasing in the region while government interventions are still going?

### **Statement of the Problem**

In a bid to tackle poverty and hunger across the country, social investment program under the office of the presidency was established. The program was designed to ensure more equitable distribution of resources to vulnerable population, including children, youth and women. The ministry is dedicated to allocating fund in order to alleviate poverty, assist young graduate to acquire and develop life-long skill, provide intervention for traders and empowering women as cooks. Although the actual funds released for the programs between January 2016 and October 2021 amounted to #2.6 trillion (Guardian, 2020; Premium Times, 2021). One of the main objectives of the programs is to eradicate poverty and create job opportunity. Unfortunately, despite the government intervention through social investment programs to eradicate poverty and create more job opportunities, Nigeria is no doubt currently among the countries embattled with a higher rate of poverty (Afeez, & Ireen, 2020; NNBS, 2021; World Bank 2020; UN, 2021), unemployment (Afeez, & Ireen, 2020; World Bank, 2020), and hunger (UN, 2021). The current social investment programs do not alleviate poverty and hunger in the country but rather the index of poverty in the region has doubled from 2015 to date (World Bank, 2020; NNBS, 2021). Continue with current social investment programs prevents acquiring lifelong skills and causes many people to depend on government jobs, which in turn inhibits the achievement of the goals of the programs. An evaluation of the programs could help better understand why poverty prevalence is higher in the region, while the program is still going. This could help the ministry to better understand the needs of the people in the region for better implementation. This study explored the opinion of Nigerians concerning different aspects of the social investment program.

**The objective of the Study:** The purpose of this study is to evaluate social investment programs in eradicating poverty in the North-Western region of Nigeria, specifically the study will:

1. Determine the objectives of the program
2. Determine which area do the people feel the program should focus
3. Determine what is the people opinion on how the program should be run
4. Determine whether the program achieved its objectives
5. Determine the strengths and weaknesses of the program

**Research Questions:** Based on the literature reviewed, and Sustainable Development Goals of providing productive employment opportunities which will focus on creating better and more productive jobs, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What are the objectives of the program?
2. which area should the government focus on in order to achieve its objectives
3. How should the program be run to achieve the set objectives?
4. Describe whether the program has achieved its objectives.
5. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the program?

### **Research Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative case study design. The design was known for its ability to explore information and understand the phenomena from the participant's point of view. It will also enable the researcher to deeply understand the nature of the program, how it was implemented and whether the participants have understood the objectives of the program. The study was carried out in the northwestern states of Kaduna, Sokoto, Katsina and Jigawa State. The selected States are located in the same geo-political zone and are similar in terms of their predominant engagement in crop and livestock farming, geographic region, agricultural product, high level of insecurity and high poverty rate index, as a result, these states were identified as information-rich sites in the region. A total of 20 participants, five from each state participated in this interview. The choice of participant for the interview, in all the states was purposive and based on convenience. The table below shows the number of participants and their distribution according to programmes

**Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Participants According to Programmes**

<b>Programmes</b>		Home Grown School feeding	N- Power Graduate	N- Power Graduate	Total
<b>Percentage</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Participant</b>		<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>20</b>

## Data Collection

The data for this study was gathered using an instrument of interview. According to Ary et al (2010), Interviews are a commonly used method for gathering qualitative data. They are often used to gather opinions, beliefs, and feelings about situations in the respondent's own words. The interview was semi-structured and the questions were open-ended. The responses of the participants were recorded, and stored using Android Smartphones. Maxwell (2010) stated that while there is no foolproof method to ensure validity in qualitative research, different tools can help minimise validity threats and enhance the credibility of the study's conclusions. In this vein, Ary et al (2006), recommended the use of audio or video recording devices to enhance referential adequacy. The recorded interview data was transcribed directly to avoid distortion of meaning and introduction of biases that come with summarizing. After data transcription, thematic analysis was used to organize the data in codes, categories, and themes using the three-step method outlined by Ary et al (2006).

## Findings

This study explored the opinion of Nigerians on the Federal government's Social Investment Program. The data collected was coded and organized into categories and themes according to the stated research questions.

**Table 1: Themes and Categories Related to Research Questions**

<b>Research Questions 1:</b> What are the objectives of the program?	<b>Positive</b> Reduction of poverty Help people progress Assistance to the people Reduction in the rate of unemployment	<b>Negative</b> It is business It is Politics
<b>Research Question 2:</b> What area do you think the program should focus in order to achieve its objectives	<b>Coverage</b> To all households On Training To all Nigerians acquisition Rural Dwellers	<b>Focus</b>  Skill
<b>Research 3:</b> what is your opinion on how the program should be run?	<b>Integrity/Transparency</b> Recruitment from the school area creation of centres Monitoring Reliable people	<b>Period</b> Continuation of the program
<b>Research Question 4:</b> Describe whether	<b>Positive</b> There were beneficiaries	<b>Coverage/ Centralization</b> representation in every area
		<b>Innovative</b> Beyond SIP
		<b>Negative</b> No employment
		<b>Neutral</b> Partial achievement

the objective of the social investment program has been achieved	Many found relief Skill acquisition	No access			
<b>Research Question 5:</b> What are the strength and the weakness of the poverty eradication program?	<b>Access</b> Many Benefited Many couldn't access	<b>politics</b> Selection transparency	<b>coverage</b> Concentration of collection centre	<b>Sustainability</b> Enjoying the job for a short time	<b>Quality Assurance</b> Renumeration Timely Delivery High school enrolment

### Research Question One

The participants mostly are of the opinion that the social investment program objective includes assistance to people to start a business, offer employment and reduce poverty. One of the participants put it this way, The objective is they tried to reduce our poverty, is to assist the people in alleviating their poverty. Another participant is of the opinion that .... .. the objective is to help people progress. For example, those that do not have anything to do, no money to improve or set up business. Another participant put it this way,

It is a good programme created by the government, it is meant to reduce poverty and to make sure we have trained youth at the end of the programme so they be available for employment. Some of the participants connect the youth to the objective of the programme.

According to a participant. This programme is set to help reduce for people in poverty and to solve the problem of joblessness that is affecting the youth. Another participant posited that the program is set aside in order to meet the social needs of Nigerians by reducing poverty in the country. The programme was targeting the youth in particular to reduce the rate of employment.

### Research Question Two

Participants also contributed to which area the government needed to focus on to achieve the stated objective. Many offered suggestions bordering from coverage to what the programme needs to focus on to achieve the stated objectives. A participant responded this way: The program should be made available to all households. Another participant responded this way, the problem of our society is three, one man needs food, health, education and security. With these, there is no need for government intervention. Still, on focus, a participant is of the opinion that money isn't the ultimate, in her words, truly what is disturbing the people we cannot say – the people need training

and not just money. Other participant however, emphasizes on coverage. A participant simply said, Rural area, focus on rural dwellers. Another participant responded likewise, It should be made available to all Nigerian.

### **Research Question Three**

Many participants responded to this question from various perspectives. Some suggest the government lens should be focused on transparency and reliability. A participant contributed in this wise:

We should appoint reliable honest people from both religions. The people should be devoid of politics and religious bias. The people in charge should be a good representation of the whole community. In the same vein another participant submitted that,

My advice is that the government should try and get people who are reliable so that at the end people will receive the assistance promised to them. Also, a participant opined that,

In my opinion, if something like this is implemented, the government should be careful to select people who will be helped – not just give money to the people who don't have plans, people that will just squander the money. Others suggested that monitoring is key, as posited by a participant:

I want to advise that when a programme like this is set, there should be proper monitoring from the beginning to the end. Those in charge of the programme execute every part of the programme to the fullness, ensuring everything that has to do with the payment is met. Another participant put it this way, there should be proper and regular monitoring. In every region they should work with religious and traditional leaders.

Another participant was a bit innovative by suggesting that participating of the training could be utilized by the government in another way. These were her words:

First from my own opinion, anyway it should not be restricted to the social investment programme thing alone. For example, we who were trained under N Agric, we should be attached to the ministry of Agriculture. The government have our data, they can call us for a refresher course and absorb us or give start-up capital. In another vein, some participants opined decentralization and wider coverage. A participant has this to say:



There is a need to create a Centre across the ten electoral wards so as to allow more people to get access to the items given.

**Research Question Four:**

Describe whether the objective of the social investment program has been achieved. Participants in their descriptions, offered various ways they think the program has achieved its objectives or not. For instance, a participant was of the opinion that once they were not employed the programme failed. These were the words of the participant:

No, since none of us was employed, they only gave us knowledge and left like that – so how can we say it helps in eradicating poverty? Another participant described it this way,

Unfortunately, the target could not be achieved. There was bias. 70% of the target could not access it. Politics was involved. Politicians brought in their candidates. Many were given the money and they went to buy big phones and motorbikes.

Another Participant put it this way: Actually, it has not reduced unemployment – because when you absorb someone and he gets employment just for a year scheme. After one year all of them were pushed back into the labour market

However, some participants described the programme as successful. According to them, the objectives of the program were achieved. One of the participants put it this way:

Yes, the social investment program has relieved a number of households from their hardship

Some participants however described the achievement as partial. One says,

Considering, the number of beneficiaries, the program can be described as partially achieved because many people have benefited from it. A participant described their experience as follows: It was somewhat successful, but honestly, the way it was managed makes me believe that it was not entirely successful. We were taught valuable skills, but we were not given employment or any capital to start a business. The government did not keep their promises. As a result, no one was able to apply what they were trained in.

### **Research Question Five**

Participants responded with what they saw as the weakness as well as the strength of the program. Their response borders on issues of access, politics, coverage, sustainability and quality assurance. Concerning, sustainability a participant has this to say,

After enjoying, for a while – we are thrown back to the labour market – to me that is minus. One participant viewed it as a quality assurance issue. In our batch, we encountered a problem with our monthly compensation, as well as start-up funding for trainees. Another participant responded this way, one of its strengths is its ability to cover large areas but in terms of weakness, it did not cover the rural area. A participant praised a certain programme, but mentioned that not everyone could access it and that politics played a role in the selection process. His exact words were, "I appreciate the program and its benefits, but there are many who couldn't access it. On the other hand, the program's weakness lies in the fact that politics sometimes influences the selection process." Another participant echoed the same sentiment, stating that although some received assistance in establishing their businesses, there was bias in the selection process due to the involvement of politics. One participant, commenting on the Home-Grown School Feeding Programme said that, the program was unable to achieve its target of eradicating poverty. The main issue seems to be the release of funds, which is problematic due to biases. Some people who were meant to be given cooking jobs were not considered, and in some cases, you have to bribe your way to be handpicked.

### **Discussion**

#### **Research Question 1:**

Poverty is a situation where an individual cannot fulfil their basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter, as well as meet social and economic obligations, due to limited access to opportunities and resources (Orokpo et al., 2018). The objective of the National Social Investment Programme, from the participants' perspective, is to remove these shortcomings and improve access to opportunities that can transform one's socio-economic status. Therefore, a person is considered to be in a state of poverty if they are unemployed, lack skills and assets, and have limited access to social and economic infrastructure. This perspective agrees with Mannir (2016) who opined that, the removal of any factors that situate one in a state of poverty can be termed poverty eradication.

### **Research Question 2:**

What to focus on? The finding of this study underpins the fact that most government policies are strategic on paper and not on the ground. Participant's views on how to achieve better results border around coverage and focus. Many lamented that the programme activities were domiciled in the urban area and couldn't reach the rural areas where the actual poverty is much. The non-graduate component of the N-Power emphasizes on skill acquisition however, from the finding more need to be done in his regard.

### **Research Question 3**

The finding suggests that transparency in the process and the reliability of officials are crucial. Additionally, it reveals that strict supervision and monitoring need to be increased. These findings are incongruent with Daskyes and Plangshak's (2019) report, which found evidence of fraudulent and unethical practices by officers responsible for fund disbursement.

### **Research Question 4**

The study had mixed findings with some participants stating that the Social Investment Programme failed to meet its objective. This aligns with the findings of Babayo and Umar (2019) who reported that the program, aimed at training and empowering people to be self-reliant for poverty eradication, fell short of its ambition. On the other hand, the study also revealed that the program's objectives were met, which is consistent with the findings of Lamidi and Ibokwe (2021) who argued that social investment programs have positively impacted and empowered most of the youth through the introduction of entrepreneurial skills and initiatives. The authors further reported that social investment programs had restructured the formal training system to increase manpower production.

### **Research Question 5**

Participants' responses revealed the strengths and weaknesses of the social investment program. From the findings, the programme was plagued by politics, nepotism, delayed compensation, bribery, and corruption. This is in consonance with the picture painted by Ajakaiye (2002) and Danaan, (2018). The short period of engagement for N-Power was considered a drawback to the

programme. However, the increase in student enrollment due to the school feeding programme is seen as a strength.

### **Conclusion**

In this investigation, the aim was to assess the implementation of social investment program in the Northwestern Nigeria. One of the more significant findings to emerge from this study is that the social investment programme of the Nigerian Federal Government has positive objectives. In general, therefore, it seems that the programme only covers the urban areas, leaving out the rural areas. The following conclusions can be drawn from the present study that, the programme failed to achieve its objectives due to corruption and political interference. Although the current study is based on a small sample of participants, the findings suggest that government and research practitioners should use the themes emerged from this study to develop instrument and administer it to a large sample.

### **Recommendation**

To make the programme more effective, the following recommendations were given:

1. The government and stakeholders should decentralize the programme to cover both rural and urban areas for wider coverage.
2. For the success of such initiatives, reliable and transparent people should be incorporated.
3. The Government should ensure transparency and accountability by supervising and monitoring the programme.

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