

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMME AND POVERTY REDUCTION IN AKWA IBOM STATE

BY

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Abstract

Nigeria is poor in terms of the living conditions of its citizens. This makes it a paradox that poverty is prevalent in the country despite rich resource endorsements, economic and financial crises became manifest in the country in the early 1980s and the initial austerity measures proved inadequate in redressing deep seated and structural problems. The study applies the participating appraisal technique in identifying the various approaches and strategies employed by the government and non-governmental agencies to reduce poverty and mobilize the youth toward sustainable development. It employed a descriptive survey design, and was conducted in the three (3) senatorial district of the state using a sample of one hundred and twenty (120) respondents randomly selected from the two (2) Local Government in each of the senatorial districts. Data were elicited using a structured interview, and structured questionnaire schedule complemented with the observation method. Primary and secondary data were used to carry out the study. The research instruments were subjected to reliability and validity test. The analysis of the data was done using the descriptive statistics (simple percentages (%), to analyze socio-demographic data of respondents, and the inferential statistics (chi-square techniques (x^2) to test the research hypotheses. The decision theory provides the conceptual guide in the study. The findings of this study shows, among other things that there are quite a good number of strategies / techniques / approaches employed by government in solving poverty problems in the state but they have not yielded positive effects. The study recommends that government should redirect the educational curriculum to focus more on practical aspect and also include entrepreneurial / vocational training programmes as part of the tertiary education system to equip youth with necessary entrepreneurial skills that would prepare them for future challenges. Also the Nigerian government should shift its attention from over-dependence on oil and place more attention on the development of small and medium scale enterprises for sustainable economic growth in the country

Key Words: Youth empowerment, Development, Poverty, Poverty Reduction, & Youth employment.

Introduction

Nigerian 2006 national census result put her population at over one hundred and forty million. She therefore, remains the most populous African country and arguably one of the best endowed. The country is endowed in terms of abundant deposit of crude oil, mineral resources, and agricultural products to mention but a few. In spite of all these abundant resources, the quality of life of her citizens has declined significantly over the years.

Perhaps, this was why Mohammed, (2004), noted that despite the fact that Nigeria is ranked as the sixth richest nation in the world in terms of crude oil reserve and supply, and the fact that the country ranks among the nations that are blessed in terms of human and material endowment, her citizens are wallowing in abject poverty with little or no economic empowerment for the larger percentage of the populace. The Federal office of statistics confirmed that at least seventy million Nigerians now live below the poverty line when compared with eighteen million in the 1998s (Ganiba, 2006; Patrick 2005).

The reduction of poverty is the most difficult challenge facing any country in the developing world where on the average majority of the population is considered poor. Evidences in Nigeria show that the number of those in poverty has continued to increase.

It is also worthy of note that Nigeria remain the only member of the organization of petroleum exporting countries (OPEC) that is categorized among the world's poorest twenty countries (Adeola, 2011). In a related research on the poverty index in Nigeria, Okumadewa (2013) highlighted that Nigeria ranked fifty-fourth with respect to human poverty index (HPI) making her the twentieth poorest country in the world. It is also ranked thirtieth in gender related development index (GDI) while occupying the fortieth position from below in its human development index (HDI).

Indeed, the alarming and seemingly uncontrollable high rate of crime and shady deals in the country has been linked to the poverty situation. To buttress this fact, Oludotun, (2010) revealed that the increasing rate of crime such as armed robbery, advance fee fraud (419), corruption, prostitution, nepotism, drug trafficking, cultism and other social vices are definitely the product of persistent poverty in the country. The situation affects sustainable national development adversely.

Previous government in Nigeria made several attempts to alleviate the poverty situation in this country. For instance, the Gowon's regime initiated the Udoji's commission to solve the problem of poor wage of civil servants in order to improve their standard of living. The next regime of Murturla/Obasanjo decided to attack the poverty situation through agriculture by initiating the popular Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) program. This program was re-packaged by the Shagari's regime and subsequently metamorphosed into the Green Revolution Campaign.

Perhaps, the regime with the widest approach to poverty reduction is the Babangida's regime. The regime introduced the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) in 1986. This was followed by the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) in 1987. The same year, the Better Life Program was launched. The people's bank followed closely in 1989. The community Bank was also introduced and lastly the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC).

The immediate past government of Obasanjo also initiated her own programme to eradicate poverty. The first attempt was the Poverty Alleviation Program (PAP) in the year 2000 and was immediately replaced the following year by National Poverty Eradication Program (NAPEP). The regime also introduced other economic reform programs such as the Mandatory Attachment Program (CAD), and later the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (NEEDS) and others laudable Program.

Despite these concerted efforts by previous regimes, the poverty situation seems to be getting worse. The Nigerian Economic Summit Group, while assessing the eight years of Obasanjo's economic reforms on 6 May 2007 in a press conference, highlighted that the economic reforms of the Obasanjo's government did not tackle poverty effectively. Although the group applauded the reforms in service industry like the Banks, Insurance, Oil and Telecommunication, it however noted that "the reforms did not have appreciable impact in poverty reduction especially employment generation and self-empowerment (Iba, 2018).

It is against the dismal performance by the government in their effort to fight the scourge of poverty that non-governmental organizations fight against poverty by initiating various programs targeted at alleviating/reducing poverty in this country. The aim of the present research is to examine youth empowerment programme and poverty reduction in Akwa Ibom State in particular and Nigeria in general.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to investigate the impact of youth empowerment programme on poverty reduction in Akwa Ibom State.

More specifically, the study seeks to:

- (i) Assess the impact of poverty reduction program and to determine why the incidence of unemployment more pronounced among youth in Nigeria.
- (ii) Find out the impact of the activity of NAPEP and how it affects youth unemployment and empowerment in the state.

Research Hypotheses

This study is guided by the following hypotheses:

1. Ho: There is no significant relationship between government poverty reduction programmes and incidence of youth unemployment and empowerment.

2. Ho: The activity of NAPEP has no significant effect on youth unemployment and empowerment in the state.

Trends of Poverty in Less Developed Countries and in Nigeria

Poverty in Nigeria is pervasive although the country is rich in human and material resources that should translate into better living standards. According to the survey (2004 National Living Standards Survey) presented by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS 2007, about 69 million people were living in poverty, which represents 54.4 percent of the Nigerian population. Since the 1980s, the Nigerian poverty situation has been deteriorating. The rate of poverty during those years translated to 17.7 million poor people in 1980. 34.7million in 1985 and, not minding the drop between 1985 and 1992 (due to the implementation of the structural adjustment program), about 39 million people were poor in 1992. In 1996, however, about 67 million people were poor and despite the drop in incidence between 1996 and 2004, about 69 million people were poor in 2004. The high poverty rates in Nigeria go beyond low incomes, savings and growth because these are compounded by the high level of inequality resulting from unequal access to income opportunities and basic infrastructure. Unequal capabilities due to education and health status also play a role. According to the NBS (2007), Nigeria has a more unequal distribution of income than Ethiopia, Madagascar, India, Niger, the United States and Sweden. The Gini Coefficient of income inequality for Nigeria was put at 569 percent, which is among the highest within the class of comparable countries. Incidentally, the important of equal access to income opportunities and assets cannot be overemphasize as such access plays an important role in reducing poverty and spurring the economy to long-term.

Nigeria is a country that is richly blessed with vast amounts of human, physical and natural resources. The natural resource endowment of the country includes petroleum, gas, and several solid mineral resources. There is a wide range of climatic, vegetation, and soil conditions that are suitable for rich agricultural production. The diversity of species of plants and animals is indispensable for both domestic consumption and export. The country is also blessed with a vibrant population. A large proportion of who are highly educated, active and talented. According to the NBS (2007), poverty exists when a person within a household does not spend up to N23,733.00 per annum. The apparent decline in the poverty headcount in 1992 and 2004 was partly, due to a relatively faster rate of increase in the population base compared to a relatively slower rate of decline in the number of the poor. Comparable countries are those with similar characteristics in terms of gross domestic product and per capita gross national product and income. Given some of the causes and consequences of poverty discussed above, the recent trends in the incidence of poverty in the world seem rather alarming. Apart from the 1960s and the 1970s when major economic advances were witnessed the frontiers of poverty were pushed back and the income of even the poorest countries like Niger, Mali and Bangladesh and people within the countries rose. The 1980s witnessed some discrepancies in development in these countries as economic growth deteriorated with considerable decline. Absolute poverty in Nigeria: an analysis of the future trend individual's well-being. Between 1980 and 1990 the living standard of the

people got worse, such that this decade was classified as the lost decade" as far as development was concerned. Within this period, it was estimated that more than a billion people in the world live in abject poverty most of whom are hungry every day and with almost the same figure not having access to clean water for drinking, bathing and adequate sanitation. Child mortality in less developed countries is ten times higher than in the developed countries with 7 million people dying every year from preventable diseases. Within the period, poverty took on a new dimension with increasing inequality between the rich and the poor within these countries (World Bank, 1990, 1996).

The term youth or young people is used as a statistical artifact to refer specially to those aged 15-25 years. Another meaning explains that youth is a transition stage between childhood and adulthood from dependence to independence and from being recipient of society services to becoming a contributor to national, economic, political and cultural development. (World Youth Report, 2003). No one is born a good citizen no nation is born democracy rather both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime, young people must be included from birth a society that cuts itself off from its youth severs its lifetime it is condemned and bleeds to death" Kofi Anan, (2004).

According to Kofi Anan, (2004) the overall goal of empowerment is to achieve sustainable development, involvement and participation in the context of continuity of life system and the participation of itself. Development cannot be sustained if youth are not involved that is to say youth participation is a crucial factor in sustaining development.

Empowerment occurs first before development can be sustained, empowerment involves developing power with and inside the people, power that comes from and grows inside the person. According to Okweri found in an M.Sc thesis by (Danwanzam, 2004). "This power comes from awareness from knowledge of one's capacity, resources limitation and challenges, once the youth gain power they are able to resist the condition that disempowered them". He says that these should be the highest priority of government for the youth.

Background Study on the Youth Policy

Youth are one of the greatest assets that any nation can have. Not only are they legitimately regarded as the future leaders: they are, potentially and actually, the greatest investment for a country's development. They serve as a good measure of the extent to which a country can reproduce as well as sustain itself. The extent of their vitality, responsibility conduct, and roles in society is positively correlated with the development of their country.

Nigeria's population is predominantly young. Therefore, the president Obasanjo's administration, having given due consideration to the significance of the youth in socio-economic and political development, has found it most desirable and necessary to initiate this National Youth Development policy so that there will be a purposeful, focused. Well-articulated and well directed effort aimed at tapping the energy and

resourcefulness of the youth and harnessing them for the vitality, growth, and development of the country well into the 21st Century. This resolve and commitment to the development of the youth has been reinforced by resolutions of various international organisations which draw attention to the need to concretely address the problems of the youth and empower them, (e.g. The Commonwealth Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment approved in May, 1998). The National Youth Development Policy is an official declaration of the importance of the youth in National development. It is indicative of the readiness of the Federal Movement to meet the needs and aspirations of the youth as well as seek solutions to their problems. It sets guidelines for all stakeholders to empower the youth to realize their potentialities and take advantage of the opportunities available to make positive contributions to the well-being of their communities and the society as a whole.

The Policy takes into account the range of problems faced by the youth, anticipates the challenges that they are likely to confront and outlines appropriate objectives, policies, programmes and implementation plans which will be put in place so as to empower the youth to take charge of their own destiny as well as make them active participants in the shaping of the political and economic destiny of our nation. The Policy also recognizes that youths are not a homogeneous category and that differences exist among them. Therefore, the Policy contains provisions that will address the specific and special needs of each of several identified target groups. Furthermore, the Policy is informed by the provisions of Chapters (Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy) and IV (Fundamental Rights) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, provisions which demand the involvement of all Nigerians as equal partners and stakeholders in the task of building and developing our nation.

Finally, the Administration recognizes that the youth are a particular segment of the national population, that is sensitive, energetic, active and in the most productive phase of their life as citizens. Hence, the Government is committed to this progressive, creative and all-inclusive National Youth Development Policy to generate maximum expression of youthful creativity and productivity, ingenuity and freedom in the context of an appropriate environment for self-expression, self-sustenance and self-actualization by the youth.

Brief History of the Development of Youth Policy in Nigeria

Since independence in 1960, Successive Nigerian governments have initiated programmes and projects aimed at the youth. These range from in-school education programme for physical and mental development of out-of-school programme aimed at shaping the character and behaviour of the youth, as well as promoting competitive spirit and national unity and integration. In-school programme include the formation of clubs, encouragement of sporting activities and other out-door activities, with discipline instilling organisations such as Boys Scouts. Girls Guide and Man O'War. Out of school efforts include facilitation of the emergency and development of voluntary self-help associations which contribute to community development, skills and vocational training programme, competitive activities and cultural festivals.

In the decades of 1970's and 1980's, the Federal Movement elevated programme of Youth Development by the establishment of a Ministry of Youths and Sports for instance. Expanded revenue base of the State, arising from increased petroleum export earnings, resulted in the allocation of substantial resources in the funding of such programme. State Governments were encouraged to establish similar Ministries at their own level and to initiate their own youth, sports, culture and community development programmes. At the Federal level, the National Youth Service Corps programme was launched in 1973, to promote national unity and integration and expose graduates of tertiary institutions to leadership roles and community development projects before joining the job market. The Citizenship and Leadership Training Centre, Shere Hills, Jos, was developed and made to intensify its short-duration programmes and courses for youth with potentials for leadership. National sports and cultural festivals were also organised in the 1970's and 1980's as fora for the search, identification and encouragement of talent amongst the youth. However, the first attempt to introduce a National Youth Policy was in 1983. This was followed with the drafting of an inclusive Social Development Policy for Nigeria 1989 providing the basis for a review of the first Policy on Youth. Regrettably, by the early 1990's, these commendable efforts aimed at youth development started to suffer tremendous neglect.

Besides, the policy attempts hardly provided a concrete framework for addressing the heightened problems confronting the youth. This was partly because the implementation mechanisms of the policy were weak and ineffective, and also partly because the macro-economic and socio-political environment was not conducive. Thus, in the 1990's youth development came to be increasingly equated with sporting activities and competition. Even then, these were not given the necessary policy and material support that they required. Programmes for civic education and leadership training suffered a serious set-back. The issue of empowerment was hardly ever addressed. The Federal Government dismantled the Ministry of Youths and Sports, and many State Governments followed suit. Consequently, by the late 1990's it had become evident that Nigerian youths are probably the most neglected by their government, compared to youths in other countries. This was illustrated by growing unemployment and underemployment of the youth, heightened involvement of youths in crimes and delinquency, an increase of preventable diseases and other health related problems among the youth, declining school enrolment and drop-out rates, and so on. Clearly, the prevailing situation should not, and cannot, be allowed to continue, as a nation can only afford to neglect the growth and development of its youth at its own peril. With the return of power to a democratically elected civilian government, some of the constraining factors which have prevented a serious effort at policy formulation and implementation have been reduced, and a conducive atmosphere now exists for the development of a new policy for our youth. Hence, the Administration embarked on a review of the previous policies, and the development of this new National Youth Development Policy.

Overview of the National Youth Development Policy

In causing to be prepared a consensus blue print for youth development, the 1999 Administration recognizes the youths of the nation as constituting the most vital resources for national development. If correctly guided, adequately mobilized and fully integrated into the fabric of society, they will bring to national development a great reservoir of energy, resourcefulness, creativity, and dynamism; they can also constitute a threat to national stability, even survival, if allowed to drift, remain unemployed, and misguided. The Administration also recognises that the ability and capacity of the youth to derive benefits from, and contribute to, national development depends essentially on the political will of Government, the legitimacy and credibility of the National Youth Development Policy, as well as the appropriateness and adequacy of the institutional arrangements it puts in place to administer the policy and programmes. Administrators, non-governmental bodies, and other stake-holders nationwide; and attempts to government and parents, are enumerated. Also slated are key strategic areas of thrust of the Policy, such as youth empowerment, youth socialization /education training, youth recreation/sports, youth employment, and youth organization. Priority target groups of youths are identified and appropriate priority programme are as firmly indicated. Finally, unlike in previous attempts, this Policy provides for appropriate enabling legislative, institutional, budgeting/funding and monitoring and evaluation framework for its effective implementation.

Youths Empowerment

Youth empowerment means involving people in decision making processes on issues that affect them, as well as entrusting them with the knowledge and skills necessary for them to effectively and meaningfully participate in decision making especially as it affects their lives Reiss, (1988). This implied that youth empowerment is a wide-range of activities and has become an imperative not only for national development but also because the transitional period from childhood to adulthood is unquestionably a challenge for many youths.

Rappaport, (2016), expatiates further that it conveys both a psychological sense of personal control or influence and a concern with actual social influence, political power and legal rights. His conception did not also look at empowerment holistically as his definition focuses on psychological control and political influence. Tope, (2011) in his study *The Challenges Facing the Implementation of Youth Empowerment Programmes/ Economic and Development Strategy (NEEDS) in Northern Nigeria* maintains that youth empowerment does the following for African youths, it gives them the ability to make decisions about personal/collective circumstances, the ability to access information and resources for decision making, ability to consider a range of options from which to choose, ability to exercise assertiveness in collective decision making, having positive-thinking about the ability to make change, ability to learn and access skills for improving personal collective circumstance, ability to inform other's perceptions through exchange, education and engagement, involvement in the growth process and changes that is never ending and self-initiated, increasing one's positive self-image and overcoming stigma, and increasing one's ability in discreet thinking to sort out right and wrong (Tope, 2011). This suggests that youth empowerment has to do with creating enabling environment for the youths within the age bracket of 18 to

35 years to take full charge of their life situation while at the same time achieving a psychological sense of personal control or influence.

In recent years, the governments of most countries have sought new approaches to harness the potential of young people and address the problems facing them. The concept of youth empowerment has gained increasing attention. For example, the 2012 report of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) observed that Africa has a youthful population made up of enthusiastic and energetic young people which, if sufficient supportive policies and programmes are put in place, could drive the social and economic prosperity of the continent. It also suggests that there must be sustained, determined, and concerted action by a wide range of actors. This implies that all stakeholders in youth empowerment and development, including governments, Non-government Organisations (NGOs), religious organisations, parents, guardians, and elders have the responsibility to empower youths around them in order to jointly realize the national objective of socio-economic transformation of communities (Yemisi, 2010).

The Youth Empowerment Scheme

The Youth Empowerment Scheme popularly tagged Project YES is a registered non-governmental organization initiated by Hajiya Zainab Kure, the former first lady of Niger State. The Scheme which was actually introduced in April 2000 was registered as a non-profit making venture with the Corporate Affairs Commission of Nigeria with registration number RC 13705.

According to the initiator and motivator, Hajiya Zainab Kure, Project YES is a form of human development intervention organization which offer opportunity for a wide range of vocational skills training for the youths because of their socio-economic situation (Kuti, 2006). The scheme is targeted at training youths by way of empowering them economically and socially. It is also expected to intervene in their educational pursuit and also offer an opportunity for initiating behavioural change in the youth through the guidance and counseling programs aimed at putting them in proper psychological frame of mind for many challenges ahead in life. So far, over five thousand youths from the twenty-five Local Government Areas of the state have graduated from various training programs offered by the Project. It is also worthy of note that the graduates of the various trades are usually given startup capital and tools required for the particular trade. Indeed, graduates of the scheme, according to Yahaya, (2016), are not only self-employed but also employers of labour.

Across the country, similar non-governmental organizations are gradually being established to support the government effort against poverty. Prominent among these NGOs are: The African Diaspora Foundation, Lagos; Grassroots Women Foundation, Enugu; Women's Consortium of Nigeria, Lagos; and People of People International, Lagos, to mention but a few, just like project YES, the NGOs are non-profit making organizations dedicated to offering selfless service for the purpose of humanity and subsequently supplementing government effort at improving the living standard of Nigerians.

Theoretical Framework

This work adopts the decision making theory in trying to explain and provide a solution to the problems of poverty and youth empowerment if used properly.

Decision Theory

Decision making is a natural phenomenon. The process through which it was articulated into a body of theory is the result of man intellectual quest and advancement centuries before Benoulli was born, the Athenian citizens of Greece had already evolved a workable model of making political decision in furtherance of their Democracy by the "Kratia" also the glorified Roman Empire was able to take concrete economic decision that made the emperor the imperial ruler of the world then. (Synder et al. 1992).

According to J. R. Thackrah (1986) he says a decision is a choice of goals or means at reaching some goals from among those seen to be available as alternative at the time for the purpose of reaching to the requirement of specific complex issue or some situation though likely to occur in the future.

According to Synder, he posits that decision making theory lies at the heart of all political action and therefore it alone provide the common focus under which we can bring together, the political actors, situations and processes for the purpose of analysis, he posits that understanding a particular action requires the analyst.

a. To ascertain who made the decision that resulted in the action.

b. Examines the interactive factors that influence the decision maker.

According to him the internal setting includes such variables of the local society as public opinion, dominant value orientation, organization, dynamic and social structure the external setting consists of such factors as the action and reaction of other actors in the international of national arena and the physical environment. Among the forces which make up the decision making process are the organizational decision of sphere of competence. The flow of communication and the motivation of decision makers.

C. T. Allison on the other hand suggested three model of decision making they include the rationale actor model, organization model, and bureaucratic model theory. The rational actors model, here, the state is assumed to be a unitary actor, which established goal set option and a logical way of deciding which option best meets its goal the organizational model paradigm suggest that in term of decision making on certain issues, organization in the state plays a vital role because of their knowledge over their specific areas government seek advice from these specific areas. The bureaucratic model decision are seen as a product of either sub-national organization or of bureaucracies by this we mean department or ministries of government. Encyclopedia of social science vol. 4.

Decision making theory is concerned with the selection of an optional cause of action from among a set of specified alterative cause of action on the basic of a criterion of preference decision making theory has some striking features or characteristics, these include:

1. The availability of alternative.
2. It is process oriented.
3. It is supposed to be democratic i.e. it entails a consideration of diverse opinion.
4. Communication implementation of opinion or policies and rationalization i.e. if we want to comprehend the dynamic of any action we should be prepared to perceive the word not from our view point alone but also from the perspectives of those responsible for taking decision.
 - i. It has the internal and external setting: the internal setting, this refers to the society for which the officials make decision it includes public opinion etc.
 - ii. The external setting, this consist of action and reaction of other states and nation e.g. U.S.A Britain can be used as good example since their actions and reactions about contemporary issues in the world wield great influence on decision making especially in the United Nation Security Council.

Strength of the Approach

1. The decision making approach enable us to make optimal choice from among the many competing lives and action.
2. For pattern design and adjustment, the approach or imputes before it for effective decision making.
3. Through the good decision making taken by the decision makers the society and its institutions are effectively organized and administered.
3. Through the good decision making taken by the decision makers the society and its institutions are effectively organized and administered.
4. It is significant not only to the government, but also to individuals, groups, association, institution etc.
5. It is capable of handling crisis situation.

Weaknesses/Limitations

1. It is too rationalistic – it assumes all actions to be rationale
2. It is also ideally democratic: it over-emphasizes democracy in decision making.
3. It overemphasizes also the analysis of the process to the neglect of the outcome of decision.
4. Bureaucratic bottleneck delays policies decision whether at the level of implementation of formulation.

Methodology

The study adopted the use of survey research design. This particular method was adopted because the research attempted to determine the opinion, attitude and behaviour of the beneficiaries and their instructors with respect to the phenomenon of poverty and the impact of NGOs at poverty reduction. According to Osuala (1982)

surveys are usually oriented towards the determination of status of a given phenomenon, they focus on people and their opinions, behaviours, belief and attitudes.

The study was carried out in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State because the youth empowerment scheme is solely run from the state capital. The data gathering is a structural questionnaire with 20 items. The first section of the instrument centered on personal data of the respondents. Section B focused on research question 1 and it elicited for responses to which project NAPEP/YES has succeeded in empowering beneficiaries in terms of skills acquisition for self-empowerment. Section C focused on research question 2 and it attempted to find out the impact of project YES in alleviating / reducing poverty in the state.

The researcher personally visited the head office of the Youth Empowering Scheme to administer the questionnaires. Oral interview was also used with some of the staff of project YES/NAPEP. The content addresses of the beneficiaries were collected and traced within the metropolis. The questionnaire was then distributed to them with the help of some of the staff. Oral interview was used to obtain information from some of the beneficiaries. The method was adopted to allow for freedom of expression as well as to enable the researcher obtain accurate and elaborate information. Personal visitation and interview was expected to allow for on-the-spot assessment of the businesses set up by the beneficiaries.

Test of Hypothesis I

Null Hypothesis (Ho): There is no significant relationship between government poverty reduction programmes and incidence of youth unemployment / empowerment.

Table Showing Computations of Chi-Square (χ^2)

Cell	Fo	Fe	Fo – Fe	$\frac{(Fo - Fe)^2}{Fe}$	$\frac{(Fo - Fe)^2}{Fe}$
A	43	40.27	2.73	7.45	0.19
B	12	9.52	2.48	6.15	0.65
C	11	14.39	-3.39	11.49	0.80
D	2	8.05	-6.05	36.60	4.55
E	25	1.46	23.54	554.13	379.54
F	6	14.73	-8.73	76.21	5.17
G	3	3.48	-0.48	0.23	0.07
H	8	8.30	-0.3	0.09	0.01
I	0	2.95	-2.95	8.70	2.95
J	2	0.54	1.5	2.25	4.17
					X = 398.1

Computing the Degree of Freedom (D/F)

$$D/F = (\text{row} - 1) \times (\text{column} - 1)$$

$$D/F = (2 - 1) \times (4 - 1) = 1 \times 3 = DF = 3$$

The level of Significance = 0.05

The critical table value = 9.49 (From Chi-square distribution of D/F= 3 at 0.05)

The calculated χ^2 Value = 398.1

Decision Rule

From the above calculations, it shows that the calculated table 398.1 is greater than the critical table value 79.49. Therefore, the Null hypothesis (Ho) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis (Hi) is accepted.

Conclusion: From the above analysis, it can be concluded that, there is a significant relationship between government poverty reduction programmes and incidence of youth unemployment / empowerment.

Hypothesis 2

Null Hypothesis (Ho): The activity of NAPEP has no significant effect on youth unemployment and empowerment in the state.

Table Showing Computations of Chi-Square (χ^2)

Cell	Fo	Fe	Fo – Fe	$(Fo - Fe)^2$	$\frac{(Fo - Fe)^2}{Fe}$
A	21	24.89	-3.89	15.13	0.61
B	13	48.32	-35.32	1247.50	25.82
C	54	2.20	51.8	2683.24	1219.65
D	12	2.93	9.07	82.26	28.08
E	0	3.66	-3.66	13.40	3.66
F	3	9.11	-6.11	37.33	4.09
G	4	17.68	-13.68	187.14	10.58
H	0	0.80	-0.80	0.64	0.80
I	3	1.07	1.93	3.72	3.48
J	2	1.34	0.66	0.44	0.33
					X = 1297.1

Computing the Degree of Freedom (D/F)

$$D/F = (\text{row} - 1) \times (\text{column} - 1)$$

$$D/F = (2 - 1) \times (5 - 1)$$

$$D/F = 1 \times 4 = DF = 4$$

The level of Significance = 0.05

The critical table value = 9.49 (From Chi-square distribution)

The calculated Value = 1297.1

Decision Rule

From the calculation above, it shows that the calculated table value of 1297.10 is greater than critical table value of 9.49 Therefore, the null hypothesis (Ho) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis (Hi) is accepted.

Conclusion: From the above analysis, it can be concluded that the activity of NAPEP has a significant effect on youth unemployment and empowerment in the state.

Discussion of Findings

The purpose of the study was to investigate the impact of youth empowerment programmes and poverty reduction in Akwa Ibom State. The findings revealed that the

Youth Empowerment Scheme and National Poverty Eradication Programme has succeeded in empowering its beneficiaries in terms of skills acquisition for self-employment. This agrees with the findings of the National committee on monitoring of poverty reduction programs in Nigeria (Zaynab, 2013). The monitoring committee reported that the Youth Empowerment Scheme is a successful project which has empowered thousands of youths that has hitherto lost all hopes in the state. The scheme, according to the report of the committee should be emulated by other NGOs across the country. Also in consonance with the findings of the study is Yahaya, (2016) who discovered that as a result of the successful empowerment of youths economically and socially, the Youth Empowerment Scheme has contributed tremendously to fostering of Nigerian nationhood. He also noted that the scheme has succeeded and intervening in the plight of the youths by providing them opportunities for acquisitions of vocational skills of varied but also empowered them to do more efficiently in the discharge of their responsibilities to the communities and Nigeria at large. Indeed, the scheme has succeeded in fostering youths in all ramifications, especially vocational skills acquisition for self-reliance. Similarly, the investigation revealed that the beneficiaries were able to set up their own businesses after graduation. This is in consonance with the findings of the team of National Media Tour, which discovered that “today, most of the graduates of project YES in Akwa Ibom State are not only self-employed but also employers of labour (Kuti, 2015). In the same vein, the finding of the study shows that the scheme has contributed to the economic upliftment of beneficiaries corroborates the report of Youth Empowerment Scheme practiced in Akwa Ibom State was tremendously contributed to the upliftment of the economic status of the participating youths in the state.

The research also sought to determine the impact of programme YES in reducing poverty in the state. The opinion of the respondents shows a clear indication of the great impact of project yes in reducing poverty in the state. This agrees with the findings of Yahaya, (2016), who observed that the impact project YES goes beyond the issue of poverty alleviation alone because it has also intervened in the educational pursuit of thousands of youths. As such, the youth were opportune to develop their talents, self-esteem and become useful and acceptable members of the society.

Similarly, during the course of investigation, the researcher also observed that there was an improved sense of contentment among the participants of project YES and NAPEP. This was evidence by their prompt, enthusiastic response on experiences gathered during the training periods, the new change in the skills acquired, and the fact that most of them are not only self-employed but also employers of labour.

Conclusion

Poverty eradication has become an issue in the world development agenda, it is a problem that is nonetheless of interest in the developing world, available data on poverty confirmed that poverty is very severe among the people of Nigeria, it is noted that some efforts have been made by previous administrations but despite these the menace have been on the increase.

Some apparent reasons for the failure of previous poverty eradication programmes of the government include the multiplication of these implementing institution or agencies, which allows for gross managerial inefficiency, unhealthy and counter productivity rivalries, poverty conceived project, poor staffing and lack of congruence between national, corporate and individual interest of implementing agencies waste of public funds human and material resources etc.

While the number of youths proudly aims to cover within its short and long run Projections is infinitesimal when compare with the total population of youth empowerment in the country which keep on skyrocketing, one cannot hesitate to undermine its claimed benevolence secondly, the ability of the programme to survive in the face of acute infrastructural deficits is certainly in doubt. This is not to talk of the culture of policy discontinuation which characterizes every change of governmental baton in Nigeria, that is, problem of lack of continuity of policies by successive government. Therefore, consistency in the policy formation and holistic implemented of planned policies particularly those of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial development, employability and poverty reduction is encouraged in the context of this study. Priority needs to be given to youth development programmes through productive engagements that will keep the growing number of youths in the country busy and not to be used by politicians, unscrupulous and unpatriotic Nigerians as thugs to threaten the peace, stability and development of the country.

It is, therefore, imperative to state that no meaningful development can be achieved without given priority to youth development and this is only possible when Nigerian youth are sufficiently engaged either through availability of employment opportunity and which entrepreneurial promotion and development where creative business ideas are encouraged so that the youth rather than waiting for white collar jobs are made creators of jobs. This will definitely have a multiplier effect on the rate of poverty, increase peace, security, stability as well as development of the country.

Recommendations

1. The government should pay more attention to the overall human development that can reduce poverty and hunger, especially among the youths to break the recruitment chain of Akwa Ibom State.
2. NAPEP as well as government and private media agencies should make concerted efforts in raising the people consciousness on the virtue of self-employment and self-reliant development. This is necessary, particularly for graduate of tertiary institution who continues to search for white collar jobs which are very scarce.

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