



THE IMPACT OF YOUTH EMPOWERMENT SCHEME PROGRAM FOR SELF-RELIANCE AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION IN NIGERIA

Waziri Musa¹, Jafar Umar Lawal², Idris Y. Haliru²

¹Department of Public Administration, Kaduna Polytechnic, Kaduna State-Nigeria

²Department of Social Development Kaduna Polytechnic, Kaduna State-Nigeria

³Department of Local Government Studies, Kaduna Polytechnic, Kaduna State-Nigeria

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36713/epra10633>

DOI No: 10.36713/epra10633

ABSTRACT

Nigeria is one of the most endowed economic countries in the African continent with abundant human and material resources that are capable of empowering and transforming the lives of youths towards sustainable socio-economic and political development. Majority of the youth population in Nigeria are living below the poverty line due to a high level of unemployment in the society. This study primarily examines the impact of Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES) program for Self-Reliance and poverty alleviation in three (3) States which include: Niger, Kaduna, and Zamfara state-Nigeria. Primary data was employed and data were collected through questionnaires. A total number of 534 questionnaires were distributed to the respondents using simple random technique among the beneficiaries of the various Youth Empowerment Scheme programs across the states. Four hundred and forty-two (442) respondents returned questionnaires were found to be valid for data analysis. The data collected was analyzed using Partial Least Square (PLS) statistics package to establish the statistical relationship between the anti-poverty program and poverty alleviation. The findings of the study showed that YES has a significant impact on the standard of living of the target beneficiaries, where youth were gainfully self-reliance and equally reduce their level of poverty status in those selected states. The study recommended for proper harmonization of efforts of all agencies towards the poverty alleviation programs in all the selected States in order to enhance effective implementation of a well-planned and concerted policy framework, and the involvement of the community members and stakeholders in the conceptualization, and implementation of programs, and lastly provision of adequate funds are all found to be very essential.

KEYWORDS: impact, poverty alleviation, youth empowerment, self-reliance

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is refers as the most populated black nation in Africa continent with an estimated population of 180 million people (NPC, 2013). The country is blessed with abundant human and material resources capable of transforming the country's economy and to improve the living condition of its citizens in all sectors like; oil, agriculture, gold, coal, and abundant resilient human capital among others (Adegami & Uche, 2016; Chindo, Naibbi, & Abdullahi, 2014). Despite all these resources, statistics indicated that since the attainment of its political independence, poverty in the country has been on the increase with the consequent rise in the population (Abdussalam, 2015).

The World Bank report (2011) reveals that the poverty rate in Nigeria is worse when measuring it using the international poverty line. The population of people living below \$1.00 per day in 2010 was 61.2 percent, while those living below \$1.25 per day

between 2003/2004 were 64.41 percent and 68 percent in 2010. Also, those living below \$2.00 per day in 2010 were 84 percent (World Bank, 2011). In a similar view, statistics have also shown that the rate of unemployment in the country from 2007 to 2014 is worrisome, the record shows that there is a rapid increase from 13.1 % in 2000, rose to 19.7 % in 2009 and 23.9% in 2011 to 28.5% in 2013 up to 30% in 2014 respectively (NBS, 2011).

Furthermore, the rate of unemployment had been increased over the years in Niger, Kaduna and Zamfara state in Nigraia is devastating, and statistics have shown that in 2009 the rate of unemployment was 4.2 percent in Niger state, 3.9 percent in Kaduna state, and 6.8 in Zamfara state (NBS, 2014). While the poverty rate drop in 2010 to 3.9 percent in Niger State, later rises to 28 percent, drastically reduced to 11.7 percent in 2010 and increased to 39.4 percent in 2011 respectively. The UN report (2015) revealed that the increasing rate of unemployment in



Kaduna and Zamfara states yearly is associated with the insecurity situation ravaging various communities across the states. The rate of unemployment in Niger, Kaduna and Zamfara states and Nigeria at large has reached an alarming proportion.

In addition, government at all level in Nigeria had made series of efforts towards addressing the challenges of unemployment and poverty alleviation in the country through various poverty intervention programs, such as National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), Green Revolution (GR), Directorate of Food, Road, and Rural Infrastructure (DIFRRI), Agricultural Credit Scheme (ACS), National Directorate of Employment (NDE) Capacity Acquisition Programme (CAP) and Credit Delivery Programme (CDP) among others (Akujuru & Harcourt, 2013; Ohize & Adamu, 2009). Despite all the efforts made by the different government in Nigeria towards poverty alleviation, the percentage of people living in poverty in the country remained unattractive (Oshewole, 2010). Persistent increase in the poverty rate in the country is generating much concern for the government at all level (Federal, State & Local government).

The YES program is targeted for the training of youths by empowering them socially, and economically in order to become self-reliance and to enhance their income for economic productive. The Youth Empowerment Scheme is a form of human development intervention that offers a wide range of vocational skills training opportunities for the youths due to their socio-economic situation in the society (Kuti, 2006). It is one of the mechanisms put in place by the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) in dealing with poverty incidence in Nigeria. This is a well-designed skill acquisition framework targeting the unemployed youth aimed at developing Nigerian youth under the national programme of NAPEP. Therefore, this study intends to examine the impact of the Youth Empowerment Scheme for Self-Reliance and Poverty Alleviation in three selected states (Niger, Kaduna and Zamfara) in Nigeria. Some of the benefits and activities under the YES programme in Niger, Kaduna and Zamfara State include vocational skills training like welding, tailoring, barbing, beads making, microcredit for self-reliance among the enterprising poor individuals, and many others.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW ON YOUTH EMPOWERMENT AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION

The concept of poverty has different perspectives, according to Sen, (1999) opined that poverty is the failure to achieve basic life needs such as living a healthy life, being adequately nourished, possession of skills to participate in economic and social life, taking part in community social activities etc. This conceptualization forms the basis for the belief that 'poverty is multidimensional' in nature. In a similar opinion Aliyu, (2003), view poverty as a severe deprivation of some basic human needs at the individual or household level. Here, poverty is a material deprivation and this can be assessed in monetary

terms. While this conceptualization of poverty has failed to recognize the non-material forms of deprivation such as illiteracy, lack political participation in decision making and social discrimination among others. In a different opinion Narayan *et al.*, (2000) posits that, poverty has both physical and psychological proportions, whereby poor people in the society strongly emphasize on violence and crime, discrimination, insecurity and political repression, biased or brutal policing, and victimization by rule of law, neglectful or corrupt public agencies etc. all these attributed to poverty.

Empowerment is a critical factor for achieving poverty eradication, is a plan designed to improve the economic and social life of a specific group of people in society (World Bank, 1975). People need to be made aware of their rights and entitlements, equipped with skills to make an informed choice and negotiate for their rights and have access to resources for their human development. Ekanen (2014) (as cited in ChukumaDuru, n.d.) opined empowerment as a means to extend the benefits of socioeconomic and political development in the economy to the poorest among those who seek a livelihood in the rural areas. The socio-economic development of any country is measured by the standard of living of their citizens, general welfare, and the youth empowerment.

The Youth Empowerment Scheme is a policy framework or a mechanism put in place that provides training, empowerment opportunities, skills acquisition, and wealth creation to enhance income generation, and improve the social status among the unemployed youth (Ohize & Adamu, 2009). Furthermore, youth empowerment scheme according to Jimba (2007) involves various ways through which youth can be transformed to cause changes so that they can become more productive in their societal living. It is a means of inculcating into the youths the spirit of the transformation of ideas into creativeness, exposing them into vocational skills or training that makes them productive, and it encompasses different ways which exposed them into different trades that may help them to engage in sustainable paid and self-employment.

In a similar opinion, youth empowerment scheme according to Ogundowolo (1998) is to prepare and equip the youths with appropriate skills that can be beneficial to them in the future. He also maintained that ideal vocational skill acquisitions are capable of ensuring value re-orientation among the youths and transforming them into creators of wealth and employment opportunities instead of job seekers. Basically, the creation of wealth and employment will lead to poverty reduction and the increment of welfare status of individuals in the society which would lead to human and national development.

2.1 General Overview of Poverty Alleviation

Poverty alleviation programs were introduced globally by different governments and non-governmental organizations to serve as useful tools used to combat the scourge of poverty, creating job opportunities and improving the living standard of



the poor and vulnerable people in both the urban and the rural areas (World Bank, 2001). Poverty alleviation is a challenge that no country developed or developing has overcome. It has become a major target of remarkable attention in developed and developing nations. The programs majorly intended to empower the poor to independently take decisions to enhance self-dependence as well as self-reliance, self-confidence, and self-esteem (Al-shami, Majid, & Rashid, 2014).

In a different view, Riddell and Robinson (1992) defined poverty alleviation as government or non-governmental intervention aimed at a sustained improvement in the economic status of the poor group of people, by raising their incomes and generating employment opportunities which in turn will promote investment, savings, and consumption. The above definition entails that, any program employed to alleviate poverty must be sustainable and capable of creating employment as well as enhancing the economic status of the poor people.

Several poverty alleviation programs were formulated and applied to the study of poverty in many countries around the world including Nigeria. This is not only to help in determining the magnitude of poverty but also assist the policymakers in designing the best strategies for the poverty alleviation. Furthermore, poverty has been a major contending force against peace and development, especially in rural areas (World Bank, 2001). Despite many laudable programs designed to alleviate the scourge of poverty, it has remained persistently, and it has become a major concern for international agencies and development experts to come up with different laudable programs towards alleviating the scourge of poverty around the world.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a survey research design; hence, data was randomly collected through quantitative sources from nine (9) selected local government areas in three senatorial districts from each selected study states (Niger, Kaduna, & Zamfara). A total number of 534 questionnaires were distributed to the respondents and 442 were valid for analysis. As opined by Creswell (2012) questionnaire returned rate is considered to be valid if it exceeded 50 per cent of the total distributed to the field. This study adopts a probability sampling technique which gives each beneficiary from the sample population an equal chance for being selected as a sample in order to minimize high rate of biases (Sekaran & Bougie, 2014). Similarly, multistage sampling technique was used, where Niger state was clustered into three senatorial zones. A PLS-SEM path modeling was used to establish the statistical relationship between youth empowerment scheme program and poverty alleviation and subsequently to determine the prime impact to the target beneficiaries. Based on the above premise, results of the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents, for instance, their income-earning before and

after the program were put into consideration as well. In addition, measurement for this study was adopted from the study conducted by (Ilemona, 2014; Ntiwunka, 2014; Idris, 2017) with some minor conceptual adjustments that suit the context of the present study area to measure the independent and the dependent variables using 5 Likert scales.

4.0 UNDERPINNING THEORY

The theory underpinning this study is Natural circumstantial theory identify such factors in the matrix of poverty-induced equations as the geographical locations and natural endowment of the environment in which person lives, unemployment, old age and physical disabilities as the factors surrounding the circumstance of people to live in poverty. The argument here is that the major causes of poverty are: poor environment, lack of capacity to tap the resources of the environment, inefficient and wasteful exploitation of the resources and the environment by the leaders. In this sense, poverty is seen as a natural circumstance which relates to the nature of the environment which people lives and the inability of the people to harness the available resources within their living environment. These scenarios became an illusion and a plot to youth empowerment schemes in the Nigerian context, where the environment is not conducive for the youth to become self-employed due to the mismanagement of the public resources and total dominations of the society by the ruling class.

5.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS OF THE FINDINGS

Measurement model

The measurement model assessment is essential in order to establish the reliability and the validity of the data. The general rule of composite reliability pronounced that indicators that have distinctive loadings and can be taken to signify in the same way as Cronbach's alpha. In order to establish the reliability and validity of measures, individual item reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity were evidently measured (Hair Jr, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2013). The composite reliability coefficient for youth empowerment is 0.835 and for Poverty Alleviation stand as 0.852 respectively. This showed that all the variables have exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.70 which clearly signifying the acceptance of internal consistency reliability of the measures used in the current study (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011). The table 1.1 below illustrates the composition reliability coefficient of the variables. Similarly, in order to determine the convergent validity, the Average Variance Extraction (AVE) for each of the variables were analyzed and found to be above 0.50 as also shown in table 1.1 below hence, signifying a satisfactory convergent validity (Hair Jr, *et al.*, 2013; Bagozzi & Yi, 1991).



Table 1.1
The results of the Measurement Model

Code	Loading	AVE	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha
YE10	.660	.506	.835	.750
YE4	.793			
YE6	.709			
YE8	.799			
YE9	.568			
PA10	.752	.537	.852	.785
PA12	.660			
PA4	.743			
PA6	.721			
PA8	.782			

Note: YE=Youth Empowerment, PA=Poverty Alleviation

In order to determine the discriminant validity, the study compares the correlations between the variables with a square root of AVE as a yardstick for measurements. Though as a rule, the square root result of the AVE for each variable is projected to

be above the correlation of the specific variable with any other variables (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 2.1 below has shown the latent variable correlation.

Table 2.1
Latent Variables Correlation

Variables	YES	PA
YE	.711	
PA		.732

Note: the values in bold across diagonal are the square root of AVE, while of the diagonal value not in bold are the correlations among variables.

Structural Model

The structural model evaluation is important for the model predictive ability. This study compares the anti-poverty program

(youth empowerment scheme) and its impact on self-reliance for poverty alleviation. The analysis results and the summary of the findings are presented in table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1
Hypotheses Test

Hypothesis	Relationships	Beta value (β)	Standard Error	T value	P value	Decision
H ₁	YE-> PA	.220	.046	4.835	0.000	Supported

***P<0.01 **P<0.05 *P<0.1

Based on the developed hypothesis, H₁ predicted that Youth Empowerment Scheme is positively related to self-reliance and poverty alleviation in three (3) selected state (Niger, Kaduna & Zamfara). Although, the result in table 3 above illustrated that there is a significant positive relationship between youth empowerment scheme and poverty alleviation where: $\beta = .220$, $t = 4.835$, $p = 0.000$ thereby supporting hypotheses H₁ and it was in line with the predictions of the previous studies (Abdulsalam,

2015; Abefe, 2014; Ohize & Adamu, 2009). Other studies also testified that there is a significant improvement in the lives of beneficiaries of the youth empowerment scheme it has greatly enable them to improve their living standard and income which have in no small measure will lead to sustained poverty alleviation (Fayemi, 2012; Jimba, 2007).Table 4.1 below illustrated the socio-economic profiles of the respondents.

Table 4.1
The Demographic and socio-economic profile of the respondents

Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	292	66.1
Female	150	33.9
Age		
18-30	78	17.6
31-40	108	24.4
41-50	109	24.7
51-60	92	20.8
60 and above	55	12.4
Occupation		
Civil Service	12	2.7
Farming	204	46.2
Business	121	27.3
Other	105	23.8
Educational Qualification		
Master's Degree	2	.5
BSc./HND	24	5.4
Diploma/NCE	37	8.4
Secondary Cert.	72	16.3
Primary Cert.	81	18.3
Others	226	51.1

Computed by the Researcher: (2022)

The tables 4.1 above shown the demographic profiles of the respondents, in which the table shows the gender distribution of the respondents where the male respondent are the majority with a frequency rate of 292 representing 66.1 percent of the total valid respondents rate, against their female counterpart which accounted for frequency rate of 150 only representing 33.9 percent of the total respondents. While the age of the respondents were measured in years using range interval and the results revealed that 78 representing 17.6 percent of the respondents were within the age range of 20-30 years, while 108 representing 24.4 percent of the total valid responses fall within the age range of 31-40 years, follows by age range of 41-50 years which constitute 109 frequency rate and 24.7 percent of the total valid responses, then age range of 51-60 years also constitute 92 in terms of frequency rate and 20.8 percent of the total valid responses, and lastly those respondents who fall within the age range of 60 and above years which constitute 55 frequency rate and 12.4 percent of the total valid respondents.

Furthermore, the tables 4.1 also shown the occupational status of the respondents were 12 respondents representing 2.7 percent of the total responses are civil servants, while 204 frequency rate representing 46.2 percent of the valid responses are farmers, and 121 frequency rate representing 27.3 percent of

the total valid responses are into part-time job, lastly 105 frequency rate representing 23.8 percent of the total respondents are silence on their occupations which they belong to other categories. The educational qualifications of the respondents were also presented on the table 4 above, where M.Sc. holders have 2 frequency rate which represents 0.5 percent of the total respondents, while those with B.Sc./HND has 24 frequency rate representing 5.4 percent of the total valid responses rate, while respondents with only Diploma/NCE is amount to 37 frequency rate and a total of 8.4 percent of the total respondents.

Also, the next category of the respondents are secondary certificate holders with 72 frequency rate representing 16.3 percent of the total responses, in addition, respondents with only primary school certificate accounted for 81 frequency rate representing 18.3 percent of the total valid respondents, lastly the last category of respondents without any educational qualifications are 226 frequency rate representing 51.1 percent of the total respondents, this clearly shown that majority of the respondents are rural dwellers with no any educational certificates. Similarly, table 5.1 below has shown the socio-economic incomes of the respondents before and after the implementation of the youth empowerment schemes.

Table 5.1

Socio-economic incomes of the respondent before and after the YES program

Income earnings before YES per month (₦)	Frequency	Percentage	Income earnings after YES per month (₦)	Frequency	Percentage
10,000-20,000	174	39.4	10,000-20,000	93	21.0
21,000-30,000	111	25.1	21,000-30,000	78	17.6
31,000-40,000	103	23.3	31,000-40,000	124	28.1
41,000-50,000	51	11.5	41,000-50,000	82	18.6
51,000-60,000	3	0.7	51,000-60,000	61	13.8
61,000& above	-	-	61,000& above	4	0.9

Computed by the Researcher: (2022)

Table 5.1 above is showing the respondent's income earnings before and after the implementation of the youth empowerment programs. For instance, the table displayed the income earning of the respondents prior to the introduction of youth empowerment scheme programs which shows the first category of respondents earns a monthly income between ₦10,000 to ₦20,000 with a frequency rate of 174 representing 39.4 percent of the total number of respondents, while the second categories of the respondents also earn a monthly income between ₦21,000 to ₦30,000 have 111 frequency rate representing 25.1 percent of the total respondents respectively. But after the implementation of youth empowerment scheme programs, the income earnings of the respondents in the category one and two have increased (i.e. from ₦10,000-20,000 and ₦20,000-30,000 of category one & two, have now moved to category three, four, five and six respectively where majority of the respondents earns higher incomes between ₦31,000 to ₦40,000; also from ₦41,000 to ₦50,000; and from ₦51,000 to ₦60,000; and lastly from ₦61,000 and above. The table showed a significant increase by 4.8 percent in category three, 7.1 percent in category four, 13.1 percent in category five, and lastly 0.9 percent in category six as well.

6.0 CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Youth empowerment involves different ways through which the youths could be empowered to achieve self-reliant and enhances national development instead of depending on government for provision of white color job opportunities. It is believed that empowerment of youth through vocational training and skill acquisition programs will enhance the sustainability of the youths in different fields of profession. This is possible when the culture of creative ideas is instilled in the youths to make them productive and independent members of the society.

Also, the study recommend that, for the prospect of poverty alleviation programs initiated by government at all level would be successful as long as the leadership and the stakeholders involved are ready and willing to change from the traditional method that far favored implementation of haughty programs that

are not in line with the set policy framework when compared them with what is on ground at the target areas. Furthermore, non-government organization should also be allowed to play a vital role in poverty alleviation, this is evident from the success story from the developed countries of the world, where NGOs have immensely contributed to the economic development of the youths by providing them with vocational skill acquisition and counseling services aimed at reorienting their attitudes towards self-reliance and societal development. Lastly, funds for such programs should be fully provided and proper monitoring and accountability measures must be put in place in order to avoid misappropriation of public funds.

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