

NTech and Youth Empowerment in Bayelsa State, 2019 – 2023

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study investigates the N-Tech and youth empowerment initiatives in Bayelsa State from 2019 to 2023, focusing on the N-Power Tech program. It seeks to explore the significance of the program, the factors that led to its establishment, and its effects on poverty alleviation and unemployment. **Method:** Employing a qualitative research framework, the study used a conventional methodology, with thematic analysis to examine data related to public policy, youth empowerment, and the N-Power initiative. **Results:** The findings revealed a strong correlation between the N-Power Tech program and the reduction of unemployment and poverty in Bayelsa State. It further highlighted the importance of rural development through this initiative to address the needs of the rural population, which constitutes a large part of the state's demographic. **Novelty:** This study contributes to understanding the role of human capital development through government-led initiatives such as N-Power Tech, emphasizing the need for political neutrality and awareness campaigns to maximize the program's impact. It also advocates for targeted rural development to enhance the socio-economic well-being of the state.

INTRODUCTION

Despite being endowed with abundant natural resources and ranking as the sixth largest exporter of crude oil, Nigeria continues to experience a high rate of poverty. As a resource-rich developing nation, Nigeria possesses the largest economy in Africa [1]. Approximately 95% of export earnings, 25% of GDP, and more than 90% of economic service funds are derived from oil revenues, which the Nigerian government relies upon [2]. However, the World Bank reports that the average Nigerian survives on a daily budget of just \$1.90, illustrating the nation's pervasive economic hardship [3]. Furthermore, 55.7% of the working-age population in Nigeria is either unemployed or underemployed [4], and 40.1% of the population was classified as living in severe poverty in 2019 [3]. Despite Nigeria's vast oil and gas reserves, the nation continues to grapple with governance deficiencies, a lack of accountability, and misallocation of resources [5]. These issues are common challenges in many resource-rich nations. Unemployment and poverty remain critical economic and social challenges in Nigeria. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2010), over 50% of Nigerians live below the poverty line, necessitating urgent government intervention [6]. Research by Olajide and Diah (2017) establishes a direct link between rising poverty rates and increasing insecurity in Nigeria, with social vices such as armed robbery and burglary being exacerbated by economic hardship [7]. This correlation suggests that poverty and insecurity are interdependent. Over the years, successive administrations in Nigeria have introduced various policy interventions, including the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P), and the N-Power initiative,

aimed at tackling poverty and unemployment. According to Akujuru and Enyioko (2019), the N-Power initiative was specifically designed to address issues such as youth unemployment, low school enrollment, poverty, and entrepreneurship development [8]. The N-Power Tech program, a subcomponent of the broader N-Power initiative, particularly targets youths in Bayelsa State, leveraging digital skills and technology-driven solutions to combat unemployment and poverty. However, in the Nigerian context, a disconnect exists between policy formulation and effective implementation. The failure of past administrations to successfully execute socio-economic programs has contributed to the continued prevalence of poverty and high youth unemployment rates. Inadequate and inefficient program implementation has hindered the impact of these initiatives, limiting their ability to improve the quality of life for Nigerian youths and other vulnerable populations.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide the study:

1. What is the nature of the N-Power Tech programme in Bayelsa State?
2. What is the reason for the initiation of N-Power Tech programme in Bayelsa State?
3. What is the policy impact of N-Power Tech programme in Bayelsa State?

Objectives of the Study

The study has the following as its objectives, to:

1. Examine the nature of the N-Power Tech programme in Bayelsa State
2. Investigate the reason for the initiation of N-Power Tech programme in Bayelsa State
3. Ascertain the policy impact of N-Power Tech programme in Bayelsa State

Literature Review

Public Policy

Several scholars have conceptualized and defined public policy in different ways. According to Dye, public policy comprises **governmental acts or inactions** [9]. Cochrane et al. define public policy as actions taken by the government along with the objectives that drive them [10]. Similarly, Peters asserts that any governmental activities – whether direct or through intermediaries – that influence people's lives fall under the scope of public policy [11]. Abdulsami describes policy as a set of government decisions and initiatives intended to achieve specific objectives [12]. These include:

1. Provision of public services, such as education, healthcare, water supply, and electricity.
2. Regulation of personal and corporate activities, including policing, sanitation inspection, and security enforcement.
3. Commemoration of significant events, such as Independence Day, New Year, Democracy Day, and Labour Day.
4. Implementation of policy reforms, including amendments to election regulations, anti-corruption measures, and political-administrative reforms.

Sambo defines public policy as government-instituted policies designed for the general welfare of society [13]. Public policy, therefore, encompasses decisions and programs aimed at addressing the needs and aspirations of the public. Governments and their institutions—such as the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, along with administrative councils—serve as the primary arbiters of policy within any political system. Howlett and Ramesh further emphasize that at its core, public policy is a decision made by a government to pursue a specific course of action [14].

Youth Empowerment. Jimba describes youth empowerment as a process that enables young people to make positive changes in their lives [15]. One of the fundamental aspects of youth empowerment is equipping young individuals with the tools to think creatively and develop skills that enhance their employability. This process encompasses various approaches that expose young people to multiple professions, facilitating their participation in both paid and unpaid employment opportunities. In line with this perspective, Ogbe argues that empowering young people to generate wealth helps address economic imbalances and corrects structural deficiencies in society [16]. This approach not only provides youth with direction and focus but also instills essential life values such as discipline, humility, respect, and integrity. In response to the challenges of youth unemployment, the federal and state governments of Nigeria have established numerous skill acquisition programs aimed at fostering entrepreneurial skills and self-reliance. Several skill training programs have been implemented over the years to support youth empowerment in Nigeria [17]:

1. The Green Revolution Programme (1976), introduced as a response to the Operation Feed the Nation initiative.
2. The School-to-Land Programme and Skill Acquisition Programme (1978).
3. The Youth Employment and Vocational Skill Development Scheme (1986), under the National Directorate of Employment (NDE).
4. The Small-Scale Industrial and Graduate Farmers Programme (1988), also introduced by the NDE.
5. The National Open Apprenticeship Scheme (1988), designed to provide technical and vocational training to unemployed youth.

The primary motivation behind these youth self-sufficiency initiatives was to enable young people to generate income and improve their economic viability. Initially, government-sponsored youth empowerment programs focused primarily on agricultural production. However, over time, these programs expanded to include industrial, technological, and craft-based training. In a bid to foster an entrepreneurial spirit and innovation among Nigerian youth, the federal and state governments have continuously launched a variety of training programs that focus on different economic sectors. These initiatives serve as vital mechanisms for reducing youth unemployment, encouraging economic productivity, and enhancing skill development.

National Directorate of Employment. The National Directorate of Employment (NDE) was established by the Federal Government of Nigeria in 1986 to facilitate youth

employment and skill development. Idachaba states that this initiative employs various strategies, including workshops, seminars, and industrial finance programs, to equip young Nigerians with employable skills [18]. The NDE launched several training programs focused on enhancing youth employability.

Workshops and Seminars: The NDE organizes workshops and seminars covering multiple trade skills and invites adolescents to participate. Collaboration with both private and public sector organizations helps trainees acquire relevant skills and knowledge for their career progression.

On-the-Job Training: Newly recruited individuals under the NDE are assigned specific roles in offices, shops, and mechanical workshops to develop their creative abilities. Ochiagha asserts that effective on-the-job training relies on skilled professionals who mentor and guide trainees, facilitating a comprehensive learning experience [19].

Off-the-Job Training: This form of training allows individuals to temporarily leave their workplaces to undertake supplementary instruction that provides advanced skills relevant to their industries. Magbagbeola states that due to the rigorous nature of NDE training, participants are better prepared for employment upon program completion [20].

Programmed Instruction: This training approach employs teaching machines, programmed texts, and filmstrips for educational purposes. Participants are enrolled in specialized training centers where they acquire new technological and vocational procedures that enhance their career prospects. Unlike traditional training methods, this program integrates Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into skill development.

National Open Apprenticeship Scheme (NOAS): Douli describes the National Open Apprenticeship Scheme (NOAS) as a major skill acquisition initiative under the NDE, designed to train unemployed youth, including school dropouts, in marketable vocational skills [21]. This initiative provides candidates with applications to specify their career interests, geographical location, and educational qualifications, ensuring a structured skill development process. These employment-driven programs under the NDE have played a crucial role in enhancing employability, fostering skill development, and reducing youth unemployment in Nigeria.

The N-Power Programme: To facilitate the execution of economic development projects in Nigeria, the World Bank Group approved a \$0.5 billion International Development Association (IDA) credit in June 2016. In addition, the Nigerian Federal Government allocated \$1.3 billion within its budget to establish the National Social Investment Program (NSIP) [22]. Since its inception, nearly four million Nigerians have benefited from NSIP's social intervention initiatives, which include job training, financial assistance, and economic empowerment programs [23]. The N-Power Programme was launched as part of the NSIP, with a core objective of enhancing social security and reducing youth unemployment. Specifically targeting Nigerians aged 18–35, the program aims to equip young individuals with essential skills and knowledge that enable them to contribute effectively to their communities. A community-based strategy under the N-

Power Programme has focused on education, healthcare, and civic engagement by deploying 500,000 trained graduates to provide support services within their localities [24]. The program also emphasizes technical and digital skill development, ensuring that Nigerian youth are adequately prepared for careers in the global economy. To boost Nigeria's technology sector, the N-Power Programme provides training in specialized tech-related disciplines, including:

1. Software engineering
2. Hardware development
3. Digital animation
4. Graphic design

Thus, by focusing on digital skills and ICT innovation, the program contributes to the growth of Nigeria's technology-driven economy and enhances the global marketability of young professionals.

Key Areas of N-Power: Volunteer Corps. The N-Power Volunteer Corps was established under the Buhari administration as a two-year compensated temporary employment program for young graduates from higher institutions. The initiative seeks to address public service challenges within local communities by deploying skilled graduates to provide essential services in various sectors [25]. These services include teaching, instructional support, advisory services, and capacity-building in four key areas of economic growth [26].

1) **Education:** The N-Power Teach Program was designed to mitigate the shortage of qualified teachers in Nigerian public schools. Volunteers serve as teaching assistants (TAs) in primary schools, helping students with homework, mentoring, and boosting their self-confidence [27]. Additionally, these volunteers provide educational opportunities to low-income communities, ensuring that disadvantaged individuals gain access to fundamental academic qualifications necessary for competing in today's labor market. Furthermore, the N-Power Teach Program encourages STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education at the elementary level by engaging local community members in academic development efforts [28].

2) **Health:** Under the N-Power Health Programme, volunteers are deployed to provide preventive healthcare services, particularly targeting children and pregnant women in underserved communities. These community-based initiatives aim to improve access to basic healthcare services and strengthen Nigeria's healthcare infrastructure [29]. The program has positively impacted millions of lives through localized health outreach and intervention strategies.

3) **Agriculture:** The N-Power Agro Program was developed to support farmers across Nigeria by enhancing agricultural productivity and promoting modern farming techniques. The initiative focuses on technical and institutional advancements to empower agricultural communities, particularly those in rural areas that are often neglected in public-sector development plans [30]. The program seeks to bridge the rural-urban divide by centralizing information dissemination and knowledge-sharing in

agricultural practices. By integrating traditional farming techniques with modern digital tools, the N-Power Agro Program contributes to Nigeria's economic modernization and sustainable development [26].

4) Voluntary Asset and Income Declaration Scheme (VAIDS). The Voluntary Asset and Income Declaration Scheme (VAIDS) was introduced to encourage non-compliant and partially compliant taxpayers to voluntarily declare their income and assets while paying the required government taxes. N-Power VAIDS volunteers serve as community tax liaison officers, handling responsibilities such as: Tax promotion and advocacy; Document review and financial record maintenance; Online inquiry management and customer service; Data entry and report compilation. This initiative specifically recruits graduates in computer science, information technology, and business-related disciplines to support tax compliance and financial accountability efforts across Nigeria [31].

RESEARCH METHOD

Theoretical Framework: Human Capital Theory. In the labor market, individuals possess varied experiences, perspectives, expectations, abilities, and education levels. According to McConnell et al., a well-educated, highly trained individual contributes significantly more productive effort compared to someone with limited education and training [32]. The Human Capital Theory has gained prominence as a transformative concept in enhancing business efficiency, given that organizations rely on the expertise of their workforce to function effectively. The term "human capital" was first introduced by Schultz in 1961 in the *American Economic Review*. However, the idea dates back to the eighteenth century, when Adam Smith (1973) proposed that investing in human capabilities boosts productivity and output [33]. The theory gained widespread recognition following the work of Nobel laureate Gary Becker, who asserted that earning potential is directly linked to one's education and training [34]. Consequently, individuals with higher education levels are more likely to secure gainful employment and contribute to economic growth. According to Backer (1964), human capital serves as a material tool in production, and organizations enhance their workforce through education, training, and health programs [35]. Human capital comprises various elements, including:

1. Abilities and skills
2. Knowledge and expertise
3. Personal talents and attitudes
4. Effort and experience
5. Time investment in education and training

This theory emphasizes that investing in human resources is economically beneficial for both individuals and society as a whole. Nations that prioritize education, skill development, and healthcare tend to experience higher economic growth and prosperity. As an emerging economy in West Africa, Nigeria recognizes the importance of youth empowerment in driving development and economic sustainability. In Bayelsa

State, achieving long-term economic growth necessitates programs that enhance youth capabilities through structured skill development initiatives, such as the N-Power Tech Program. The N-Power Tech initiative specifically targets Nigerians aged 18–35, equipping them with technical expertise and practical experience to foster positive community development [36]. The study adopts the qualitative method or the prosaic method. As a result, the descriptive design is adopted. Thematic analysis will also be adopted to answer the research questions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The nature of the N-Power Tech programme in Bayelsa State. The increasing reliance on technology has become crucial in addressing unemployment and socio-economic challenges. As a result, individuals skilled in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) are in high demand across the globe [37]. The issue of youth unemployment, both locally and globally, can be effectively tackled by equipping young individuals with digital competencies. With the rapid growth of mobile application firms and the expansion of online employment, digital literacy has become a key determinant of employability. As part of the N-Power Tech Initiative, which aims to reduce youth unemployment and enhance job readiness, the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management, and Social Development is currently training over one hundred young Nigerians in coding, graphic design, and online marketing [38].

1. **Importance of Digital Skills:** According to UNESCO, digital skills encompass a broad range of competencies required to access and manage information using digital devices, communication applications, and networks. These skills enable individuals to: Overcome challenges related to personal and professional development; Engage effectively in education, employment, and social interactions; Communicate and collaborate within digital environments; Create, modify, and share digital content [39]. The European Commission classifies digital literacy as one of the "Key Competencies for Lifelong Learning" alongside information literacy, work readiness, social inclusion, civic engagement, and sustainable living. Furthermore, the European Digital Skills Survey reports that over 90% of contemporary job roles require advanced digital skills beyond traditional office-based work [40].
2. **The N-Power Tech Programme and Digital Empowerment:** The N-Power Programme was introduced to bridge the skills gap, reduce unemployment, and foster social development. Open to all Nigerians aged 18–35, the program provides essential training to equip young people with lifelong, employable skills [41]. A key objective of the N-Power Tech Initiative is to link participants with local placement opportunities. The program offers comprehensive training, mentorship, and business support, enabling beneficiaries to establish careers in software development and digital entrepreneurship. Thus, by leveraging ICT-

based education, the N-Power Tech Programme serves as a catalyst for empowering youth from disadvantaged backgrounds. Given the high unemployment rate and population density in informal settlements, this study focuses on the impact of digital skills training on youth employability in Bayelsa State. The reason for the initiation of N-Power Tech programme in Bayelsa State: The primary objective of the N-Power Tech Initiative is to combat youth unemployment and reduce poverty in Bayelsa State. According to a 2022 report by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), Bayelsa ranks as the second poorest state in Nigeria, trailing only Sokoto State. The report indicates that extreme poverty affects 2.61 million out of 2.9 million residents, meaning that 88% of Bayelsa's population lives in severe economic hardship despite the state's resource wealth [42].

3. **Link Between Poverty and Crime:** Widespread poverty, unemployment, and social exclusion have fueled the rise of organized crime, cultism, and violent activities in Bayelsa State. Criminal offenses such as kidnapping, banditry, and armed robbery are prevalent, particularly among unemployed youth [43]. The N-Power Tech Programme—a component of the broader N-Power initiative—was developed as a strategic response to this crisis. The program seeks to empower young individuals, equipping them with marketable digital skills while discouraging participation in criminal activities.
4. **Youth Empowerment as a Crime Prevention Strategy: Research** suggests a strong correlation between youth empowerment and criminal behavior. Financial independence, skill development, and career opportunities are critical in diverting young people away from illicit activities. The N-Power Tech Initiative provides a structured platform for youth to: Gain technical and digital skills; Contribute productively to society; Receive financial incentives; Build professional networks; Boost self-esteem and social recognition. Thus, by fostering pro-social workplace dynamics, the N-Power Tech Programme serves as an informal mechanism for social control, reducing antisocial behaviors and criminal tendencies among at-risk youth [44].
5. **Encouraging Digital Skills and Technology Training:** The core aim of the N-Power Tech Programme in Bayelsa is to cultivate youth interest in technology, computer programming, and software development. By providing structured training opportunities, the initiative offers an alternative pathway for young individuals to pursue legal and sustainable career prospects. This approach significantly reduces crime rates and improves economic conditions by channeling youth energy into productive technological innovation [45].

The policy impact of N-Power Tech programme in Bayelsa State.

The Nigerian Federal Government's N-Power National Social Investment Programme was designed to address high youth unemployment in Bayelsa State by investing in human capital development. A fundamental objective of this initiative is to strengthen the human capital potential of the Nigerian workforce, ensuring that young individuals acquire relevant skills for employability and economic resilience [46].

1. **Strengthening Human Capital Through Digital Skills:** A primary focus of the N-Power Tech Programme is to enhance youth employment opportunities by improving digital and technical skills. While broader youth empowerment programs address economic participation, the N-Power Tech initiative specifically targets technical skill enhancement to prepare young individuals for the technology-driven labor market [47]. The initiative has proven especially valuable for young Nigerians—both educated and uneducated—who struggle to find employment. By equipping participants with critical ICT and technical skills, the program enables them to adapt to economic uncertainties and sustain their livelihoods [48].
2. **Impact on Employment and Economic Development:** The N-Power Tech Programme has played a significant role in reducing unemployment rates in Bayelsa State. Many program participants have secured jobs in various organizations and technology-driven enterprises. This transition into employment has not only improved their economic stability but also contributed to Bayelsa State's labor market expansion. Also, the program has positively impacted the state's healthcare sector by bridging technology skill gaps in primary health care facilities. The increased availability of tech-trained personnel has improved digital record-keeping, healthcare management, and service delivery in local health clinics [49].

Discussion

The N-Power Tech Programme in Bayelsa State has proven to be a vital response to the region's ongoing socio-economic challenges, particularly in combating youth unemployment and fostering digital empowerment. Bayelsa, despite its significant natural resource wealth, remains one of the poorest states in Nigeria, with the majority of its population living below the poverty line. This economic hardship has been closely linked to rising youth unemployment and social exclusion, which have, in turn, contributed to increased criminal activity and insecurity. The N-Power Tech Programme addresses these issues by equipping youth with critical digital skills such as coding, graphic design, and digital marketing, thus opening up new pathways to employment and economic self-sufficiency. By providing comprehensive training and mentorship, the initiative not only reduces unemployment but also boosts local economic activities through the development of a digitally skilled workforce. The impact of this programme extends beyond just employment; it fosters entrepreneurship, particularly in technology-driven sectors, and promotes the creation of tech-enabled solutions that can drive further innovation and development in the state. However, the success of the N-Power Tech

programme highlights the need for a continued focus on bridging the digital skills gap and creating sustainable opportunities for the youth, thus breaking the cycle of poverty and crime that has plagued the region for decades.

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding : The study demonstrates a significant correlation between the N-Power Tech program and the alleviation of poverty and unemployment among youth in Bayelsa State, highlighting its positive impact on the region's socio-economic development. **Implication :** The findings underscore the importance of continued investment in digital skills training and N-Tech education to empower youth, stimulate entrepreneurship, and enhance the overall technological ecosystem. This has direct implications for policy formulation, particularly in promoting sustainable economic development in underdeveloped regions. **Limitation :** One limitation of the study is the reliance on qualitative data, which may not fully capture the broader quantitative impact of the N-Power Tech program across the entire state. **Future Research :** Future research should explore a comparative analysis of the N-Power Tech program's effectiveness in other regions, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a more comprehensive understanding of its impact on youth empowerment, poverty reduction, and unemployment across various socio-economic contexts.

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