

# **N-Power Agro Programmes on Youths Empowerment in Akamkpa Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria**

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**Abstract:** *This study investigated the N-Power Agro programmes on Youths Empowerment in Akamkpa Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. One research questions and One hypothesis was formulated to guide the study. ex-post facto research design was adopted for the study, while stratified and simple random sampling techniques were used in selecting 473 respondents. A 11 – item questionnaire titled: N-power Agro Programmes and Youth Empowerment Questionnaire (NAPYEQ) was used for data collection. The instrument was validated and the reliability estimate, using Cronbach alpha statistics, ranged from .68 to .74. Data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation for the research questions, while the t-test statistic was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The result showed that N-power Agro programmes has significantly impacted Youths empowerment in Akamkpa to a great extent. Based on the findings of the study recommendations were made among others that more sensitization programmes should be conducted to expose youths on the scope of N-power Agro Programmes.*

**Keywords:** N-power, Programmes, Youths, Empowerment.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

One of the major reasons developed nations invest substantial financial resources in human capital development, especially among the youths, is that the youth have sufficient energy, creative drives, and desire to change their world. The youth are conceived as people between 15 and 24 years old (United Nations as cited in UNESCO, 2021). Thus, it could be conceived as a transition period from being dependent to a period in which the individual is independent. Although the definition

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of youth varies from scholar to scholar and country to country, In Nigeria, a youth is seen as one under the age of 15 to 29 years (Nigeria National Youth Policy, 2019). Interestingly, the global youth population in 2019 was estimated at 2,000,000,000 billion, while the Sub-saharan African youth population was 211,000,000 million (United Nations, 2019). In Nigeria, Odey and Sambe (2019) reported that the estimated youth population between 18 and 35 is 52.8 per cent. Despite this number, it was reported that the youth unemployment rate was around 53.40 per cent in 2020, while the figure continued to shoot up as of January 2021(National Bureau Statistics, NBS, 2020).

To cushion the adverse effect of youth unemployment in the country, previous governments, both military and civilian, had adopted policy measures by introducing several youth empowerment programmes. Some of these programmes are Movement for Youth Actualization International (MYAI), Lagos Digital Village (LDV), International Centre for Development Affairs (ICDA), United Nations of Youth Network Nigeria (UNYNN), Foundation for Skills Development (FSD), Youth for Technology Foundation (YTF), Diamond-Crest for Youth Education Foundation (DCYEF), Youth Entrepreneur Support Programme (YES-P), Graduate Internship Scheme (GIS). Others are Youth Initiative for Sustainable Agriculture in Nigeria (YISA), Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P), Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YEIN), Youth Empowering People (YEP), Young Entrepreneurs of Nigeria (YEN), Africa Youth Empowerment Nigeria (AYEN), Youth Empowerment and Development Initiative (YEDI) (Odey & Sambe, 2019) and recently, the Nigeria Power (N-Power) Programme established in 2016 by the previous government.

The N-power programme is one of the National Social Investment Programmes designed to address the problem of youth empowerment and improve social development (Dauda et al., 2019). The programme has become a household name and platform where most Nigerians can access skills acquisition and development. Hence, the federal government designed a job creation and empowerment initiative of the Social Investment Programme to drastically reduce youth unemployment in Nigeria (Akujuru & Enyioko, 2019). The programme's scope spans providing young graduates and non-graduates within the age brackets of 18-35 years with the skills, tools and livelihood to enable them to advance from empowerment to entrepreneurship and innovation.

The wide coverage of the programme for graduates and non-graduates especially in the inculcation of various skills to youth within the specified age brackets conceived in the country is believed to accommodate all categories of youth, thereby reducing the prevalent unemployment rate. Consequently, the N-power programme is structured in six categories: N-Teach, N-Health, N-Build, N-creative, N-Agro, and N-Tech. However, while N-Teach and N-Health are designed for graduates believed to have completed their mandatory National Youth Service Corps Programmes, N-power Build, N-power Agro, N-power Creative, and N-power Tech are for both graduates and non-graduates (Osunde, 2014). The study is, however, limited to N-power Agro Programmes. The choice of these categories is premised on their widespread across a greater percentage of youth in the study area than the others. Hence, the need to ascertain the extent they have impacted empowerment of youths in Akamkpa Local Government Area.

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The N-Power Agro is a category designed to provide services to farmers across the country. Part of the focus is to support the development of efficient farming techniques and practices to maximize productivity in the agricultural sector. The other side of the category provides technological and institutional development to farming communities in rural areas, where the public service sector is particularly underrepresented. This is by creating a more vital link between rural and urban communities and centralizing the knowledge base while incorporating local knowledge and practices; the N-power Agro category is built to link the diverse communities of Nigeria while promoting a modern economy (Odey & Sambe, 2019). Consequently, all these categories by N-power are purported to reduce youth unemployment vis a-vis youth empowerment. However, Dauda (2015) asserted that agriculture which is the mainstay of our rural economy should be expanded. There is need to embark on land reforms so that, land ownership be equitably distributed among men and women without discrimination or any form of prejudice. Bello (2017) in his study of trade and investment in agriculture, found that land and labour are major inputs used in production, by an overwhelming majority of small farmers. The need for modern farm inputs such as fertilizers, improved seeds, plants protection chemicals, feed and mechanization equipment or tools and farming skill training, become absolutely necessary. Bello (2017) stated that in the field of agricultural technologies, people need to be aware of newly emerging technical and methodological possibilities, to fit various local situation. Ekwe (2014) advocated that since agriculture is the main stay of the Nigeria economy, serious attention should be paid to agricultural skill training, for increase food production. In the same vein Tunde (2015) noted that “agriculture involves the cultivation of land raising and rearing of animals for the purpose of production of food for man, feed for animals as well as raw materials for industries. It involves livestock, forestry, fishing, cropping, processing and marketing of the agricultural product.

In the same vein, Manduru (2014) explained that “in most developing countries, agriculture is both the major traditional pursuit and the key to sustained growth in the modern economy”. The author further explained that “economic growth is related to agricultural progress, and that stagnation in agriculture is the principal explanation for low economic growth” due to the importance of agriculture, Ekwe (2014) maintained that it is vital to discover the ways that can ensure increased productivity of the sector with the investment of limited time and less human resources. N-power programme especially in rural areas are involved in creating awareness in several agricultural activities such as land clearing, land tilling, planting, weeding, fertilizer as well as manure application, harvesting and food processing. They also train rural women on how to raise livestock such as chicken, sheep, turkey (Ekwe, 2014). These domestic animals produce a lot of meat for sale and consumption.

Similarly, Oboqua and Ubah (2020) reported that lack of knowledge of modern agricultural practices prevent members from being production. The authors continued by saying that appropriate technology enable members to have relevant local equipment, which help them in processing grains, preserving fruits, vegetables and storing harvested products. In a project on indigenous agricultural skills training for women on sustainable farming practices, Manduru

Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development-UK (2014), reported that rural youths in Yumbe District Uganda were trained, on animal husbandry and food production through efficient, traditional and cost effective methods. The report indicated that though the period coincided with a three months drought, the overall yield increase tremendously. Thus, there was much to eat and even to sell to bring in income. This to a great extent improved the living conditions of youths in the community.

Youth hold a vast amount of responsibility for, and knowledge of sustainable agriculture systems. They are vital natural resources users and managers in providing food and securing overall family welfare. Hence, there is need for them to obtain agricultural skill training for maximum production of food. Kellas (2015) reported that a new area of agriculture which do not demand much engagement in waste are also emerging example fish culture. He also noted that in his study of women self-help groups in Hyerabab, in India he found out that women have introduced a movement that is against indiscriminate use of pesticides covering 186,000 acres from 2006 to 2007, replacing chemical as well as, other external inputs with natural methods of pest control. This has led to a reduction in the cost of cultivation, increase income and a positive effect on female farmer's health status. Tunde (2015) reported that additional income that female members reap from farm work is often invested, in the schooling of their children. In support of the above, Ede (2022) poor and vulnerable youth in rural areas revealed that, agricultural skill training for youth improves their productivity level and has a special effect on their economic empowerment and that when youth are empowered, it has a positive impact on their families, education, health and nutritional status.

Empowerment is the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes (Owuna, 2015). It is a measure designed to increase the degree of autonomy and self-determination in people and communities to enable them to represent their interests in a responsible and self-determined way, acting on their authority. Empowerment is classified in various forms, such as economic, political, and social. Of these empowerments, economic is more relevant to the study, hence its adoption. Economic empowerment increases economic opportunities, access to, and advantages of better jobs. Youth economic empowerment ensures that youths key into a business climate that supports the initiation and sustainability of business. Youth economic empowerment refers to the ability of youths to enjoy their rights to control and benefit from resources, assets, income and their own time, as well as the ability to manage risk and improve their economic status and well-being (UNESCO, 2015). Suffice it to say that empowering youths engenders a financial sector in the nation's economy that provides access to financial services tailored to the needs of the people, particularly youths.

Consequently, youth empowerment refers to creating an environment for youth where they can make decisions for their benefit and that of society. It is a bold and sustainable action to advance youth's opportunities, rights, and participation in decision-making activities. These activities, Emejuru (2017) added, involve practical training that helps the youth survive and contribute optimally to their growth and development of society. It involves restructuring the attitude and belief patterns of the youth while equipping them with skills for positive changes in their lives and

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those of others. It is not surprising that youth empowerment is conceived as the act of engaging and creating values so that young males and females can contribute to the economic, social and cultural advancement of their families and their nations as well as their fulfilment (Ebelechukwu et al., 2021). From the views of the above authors, youth empowerment is contextually seen as the process and act of providing youth with relevant skills and competencies required to be self-reliant. By participating in the various N-power programme, it is believed that the high unemployment of most youth will be reduced.

However, despite the attractive objectives of N-power programme, there is an indication that poverty is both palpable and pervasive among most youth in Enugu State following the high rate of unemployment and inadequate life skills that are predominant in the state. Clearly, many Nigerian youths are poor and angry with the system (Okonkwo et al., 2021). This ugly situation among youth has raised questions about whether the objectives of establishing the N-power programme have been met. The study, therefore, sets to appraise the extent of the contribution of the N-power programme in the empowerment of youth in Akamkpa of Cross River State.

N-power programme aims to address youth unemployment by providing work skills development and improving public services in Nigeria, particularly in Cross River State. However, their contributions on daily living and youth hardships in Enugu has yet to be discovered. Hence, there is a need for the study. The researcher is concerned that despite government efforts to alleviate poverty by establishing various poverty alleviation programmes, such as the N-power programme to improve youths living conditions, the rate of poverty among them has remained unabated. The problem of this study, therefore, is to ascertain the extent to which N-power agro programme have impacted youths empowerment in Akampka of Cross River State.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of this study was to examine the extent to which the N-power Agro programme has impacted youth empowerment in Akampka Local Government Area of Cross River State. Specifically, the study sought to determine the extent to which the:

1. N-power Agro has promoted youth empowerment in Akampka Local Government Area

### **Research Question**

The research question guided the study

1. To what extent has N-power agro promoted youth empowerment?

### **Hypothesis**

The null hypothesis was tested at .05 level of significance.

H<sub>01</sub> There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of youths from Akamkpa LGA on the extent to which N-power agro has impacted youth empowerment.

## METHODOLOGY

The ex-post facto design was adopted for the study-sample for the study 473 respondents randomly drawn from two senatorial districts in the study area. the instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire titled N-Power Agro programme and Youths Empowerment Questionnaire (NAPYEQ) designed by the researcher. The instrument had two sections A and B. Section A had respondents' demographic information while section B was a 11 item questionnaire in the form of modified four-point rating scale of Very Great Extent (VGE), Great Extent (GE), Low Extent (LE) and Very Low Extent (VLE). The instrument was validated by three experts, two experts from the Department of Sociology and one from the Department of Measurement and Evaluation, all from Federal University Lafia. The reliability estimate was done using Cronbach Alpha Statistics, ranged from .68 to .74. Data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviation for the research questions, while the t-test statistic was used to test the null hypotheses at .05 level of significance. The criterion mean was 2.50. This implies that mean responses of 2.50 and above showed that the respondents agreed, while mean responses below 2.50 showed that the respondents disagreed.

## RESULTS

**Research Question One:** To what extent has N-power agro programme impacted youth empowerment in Akampka LGA.

**Table 2: Mean ratings of respondents on the extent to which N-power agro programme has impacted youth empowerment in Akampka LGA. N = 478**

| S/N | Item Statement  | $\bar{x}$   | SD          | Remark              |
|-----|---|-------------|-------------|---------------------|
| 1   | Improved my skills in poultry farming production                | 2.68        | 0.93        | Great Extent        |
| 2   | Improved my skills in fish production                           | 2.71        | 0.84        | Great Extent        |
| 3   | Improved my skills in pre-planting activities                   | 2.73        | 0.94        | Great Extent        |
| 4   | Improved my skills in post planting activities                  | 2.55        | 0.97        | Great Extent        |
| 5   | Improved my skills in preservation and storage activities       | 2.71        | 0.96        | Great Extent        |
| 6   | Improved my skills in preparation of planting crops             | 2.92        | 1.04        | Great Extent        |
| 7   | Improved my skills in fertilizers chemical application on crops | 3.07        | 0.81        | Great Extent        |
| 8   | Improved my skills in the use of modern farm tools              | 2.76        | 0.81        | Great Extent        |
| 9   | Improved my skills in attending workshops and seminars          | 2.92        | 0.87        | Great Extent        |
| 10  | Improved my skills in gardening activities                      | 3.01        | 0.96        | Great Extent        |
| 11  | Improved my skills in pig farming production                    | 0.83        | 0.73        | Great Extent        |
|     | <b>Cluster mean</b>   | <b>2.81</b> | <b>0.90</b> | <b>Great Extent</b> |

Table 1 shows that items 1-11 with mean scores of 2.68, 2.71, 2.73, 2.55, 2.71, 2.92, 3.07, 2.76, 2.92, 3.01 and 2.83 were classified under the limit (2.50 – 3.49) as great extent and SD of 0.93, 0.84, 0.94, 0.97, 0.96, 1.04, 0.81, 0.81, 0.87, 0.96 and 0.73. With the cluster mean of 2.81 and SD

Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development-UK of 0.90, the Table shows that to a great extent, N-power agro has greatly impacted youth empowerment in Akampka LGA.

**Hypothesis One:** There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of youth from Akampka LGA on the extent to which N-power agro programme impacted youth empowerment

**Table 2: t-test analysis of difference in the mean ratings of respondents on the extent to which N-power agro has impacted youth empowerment in Akampka Local Government Area.**

| Senatorial Zone | No. of Respondent | $\bar{x}$ | SD   | Df  | $t_{cal}$ | pvalue | Decision |
|-----------------|-------------------|-----------|------|-----|-----------|--------|----------|
| Southern        | 195               | 2.76      | 0.60 | 476 | 1.81      | 0.07   | Ns       |
| Central         | 283               | 2.85      | 0.47 |     |           |        |          |

Table 2 shows that ( $t = 1.81, p = 0.07$ ). Thus, with the associated probability value greater than 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is hereby not rejected. This implies that there was no significant difference in the mean ratings of youth from Akampka Local Government Area on the extent in which N-power agro had impacted youth empowerment.

## DISCUSSION

Findings from research question one show that to a great extent N-power agro has promoted youth empowerment in Akampka LGA. The significant benefit of the category is evident in the acquisition of agro-related skills for enhanced standard of living. By diversifying into business activities, through the acquisition of these skills, participants are said to be economically empowered. The finding is in tandem with Olabisi and Oboqua (2023), that vocational training significantly influences the empowerment of female member. Similarly, Oboqua and Ubah (2020) reported that farming skills acquisition has a positive significant influence on the empowerment of rural women. These studies infer that with the exposure of youth to N-power agro category, they are likely to be empowered, thus reducing restiveness in the study area.

## CONCLUSION

In view of the findings of this study, it was concluded that to a great extent N-power agro programmes have a significantly impacted youths empowerment in Akampka LGA.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations were made

1. More sensitization programmes should be conducted to expose youth on the scope of N-power agro

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2. Government should ensure timely release of fund for the procurement of modern farm tools required in promoting agro activities.
3. More youths should be involved in agricultural programmes in order to improve food security

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